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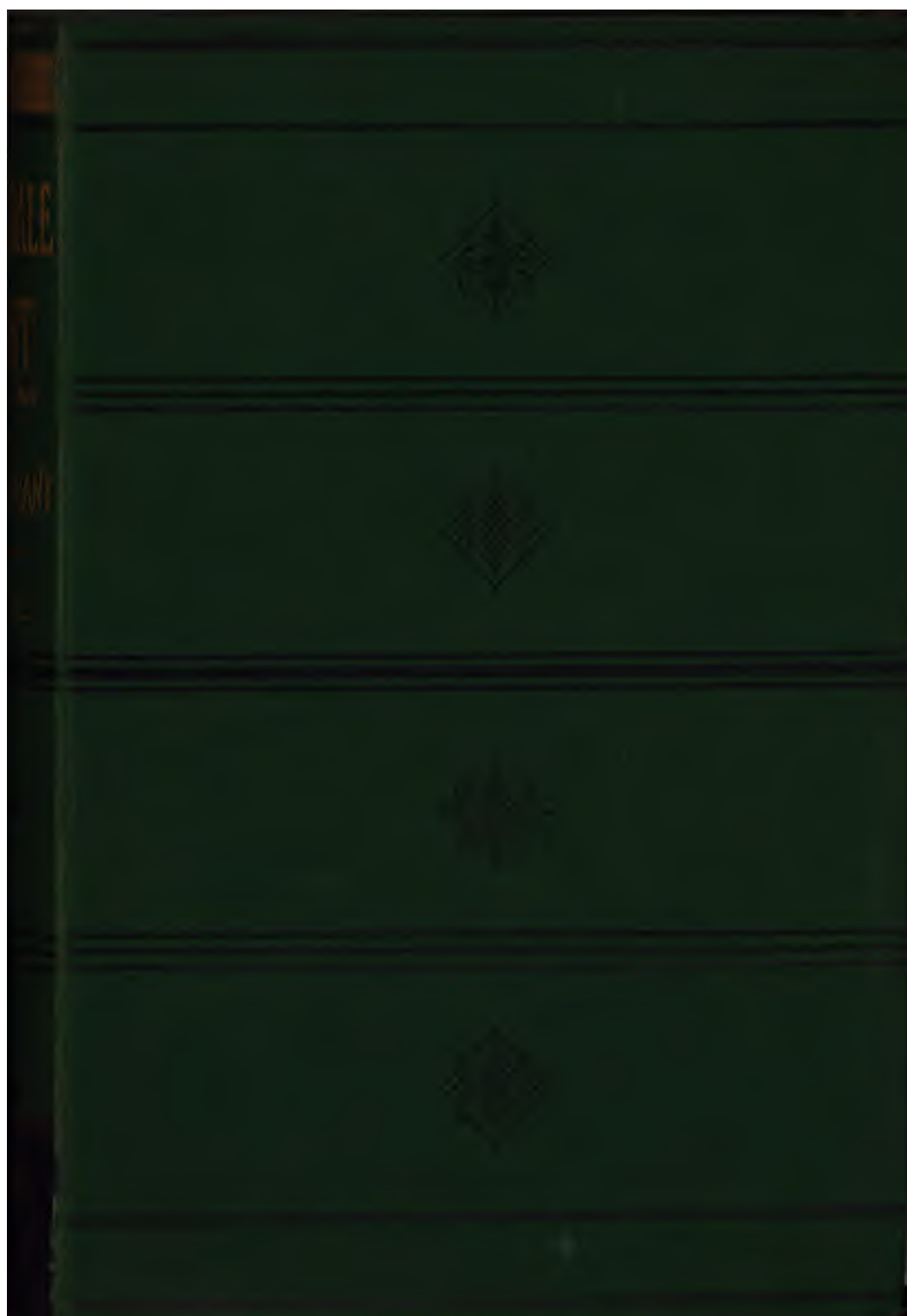
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RIVERSDALE COURT.

RIVERSDALE COURT.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. FORREST-GRANT,

AUTHOR OF 'FAIR, BUT NOT WISE,' 'THE MAGIC OF LOVE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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RIVERSDALE COURT.

CHAPTER I.

ARRIVAL AT RIVERSDALE COURT.

IN how many if not in all our lives does the remembrance of certain far-off events stand prominently forward, defined and clear, as though of only yesterday's occurrence, while every connecting circumstance of before and after has drifted utterly out of sight! But these memories,—yes, there they lie, tiny islands on a boundless ocean, green spots amid deserts of sand; and like one such island, one such spot, is the recollection of my first day of arrival at Riversdale Court. Eight Indian summers had done their fiery utmost to dry up the life-blood in my young veins, when early one June I was borne from the carriage a shapeless bundle of shawls and wrappings, in

the strong arms of Jeffry, the butler, into the hall, where my grandmother, Lady Denzell, waited to receive me.

How distinctly my mind's eye sees her now, as there she stood, a sweet, gentle-looking old lady of middle height and clear but pale complexion; and my child's heart opened out at once to her, not merely because of her own attractiveness, but by reason of a certain resemblance in expression and feature to my father, of whom I was very fond. Twelve years have elapsed since that day, and to this hour a vivid impression yet dwells in my mind of the feeling of surprise and 'chilling disappointment I experienced at sight of the lifeless gloom and unadorned heaviness of the great old entrance-hall of Riversdale Court—unadorned save for the huge terrific-looking stags' heads and horns, dingy portraits, and gigantic organ towering aloft in the distance, all of which antiquated remains I, for long after, mentally decided the place would have been infinitely more cheerful without.

Wafted, as it were, from one mansion to another—from the gorgeous Oriental splendours of my father's palace-like residence near Delhi,

its countless swarm of turbaned attendants, its prevailing glow and glitter, and ceaseless but quiet stir of—so it seemed to me—joyous existence, from the magnificence and luxury in which that Eastern clime abounds for the great and the wealthy, and of which even the richest inhabitants of these colder and by nature niggardly favoured regions have not the faintest conception,—wafted, I say, from all this and much more to my present English country home, the contrast was so strange, so icy in its effects upon my inexperienced intellects and senses, that it was positively quite painful.

The time for these disparaging comparisons was, however, so brief that no other but the young, keen sight of a sharp child could have observed all I did so rapidly.

“Bring her in here, Jeffry, bring her in here!” cried the excited voice of my grandmother, speaking in tones of suppressed rapture, and hastening the while towards an open door. Accordingly in I was brought, and put to stand on a chair, and my black nurse and Mrs. Patterson, the housekeeper, proceeded at once to divest me of my numerous envelopes. This

was effected much in the fashion of unwinding the silk from a cocoon, and with almost as satisfactory results regarding the precious atom so carefully enclosed, and which finally emerged into daylight the smallest, whitest caterpillar-apology for a child the Riversdale Court inhabitants had ever looked upon.

Grandmamma was summoned from the room during the operation of unrobing, and thereby lost the first effects.

“My goodness!” ejaculated Mistress Patterson, gazing at me with breathless astonishment, “is this *all*? Well, it is the mountain and the mouse, if anything ever was! Why, la me! there can’t be but half—half? bless me, not the *quarter*—of a life left in such a midge of a creature! Good gracious! to think of sending her all this long, long way, merely to—to—” Meeting my eyes, which perhaps expressed more of curiosity and matured understanding than she had expected in so young and small a thing, she stopped abruptly.

Perched on a chair which just brought me on a level with the broad, round face of my plain-spoken examiner, I also stared, and mentally

criticized with that quiet, easy confidence peculiar to Indian children.

In an equally complimentary spirit I decided that she was a very ugly old woman, that she had a very queer red skin, and I did not like red half as well as black; altogether she was not to be compared in looks to my dear, kind, ebony-complexioned nurse.

"She would not seem so small like, maybe, if her bit of a face weren't most three parts taken up by such big brown eyes, and that thick frizzle of lashes round 'em," objected the housekeeper, who secretly regarded with great disfavour the addition to their hitherto sleepy, comfort-loving establishment of a sickly, restless child—an only child too, accustomed to be pampered and petted to the highest bent of her capricious unreasoning, and often perhaps utterly unreasonable, young fancies.

"Ah, missy, de leetle beauty! dat what she is"; and nurse clasped my diminutive form in her loving arms, and kissed my faded cheek with the proud affection usual in that gentle race for their young charges. "She will grow up like her lubly mudder, and all de great grand gentilmans will go mad for her! Yes,

dat's what dey will!" again kissing and hugging me.

"Hum!" grumbled Mistress Patterson, looking exceedingly disposed to further relieve her annoyed feelings by a few more flattering comments on my personal appearance, but the return of grandmamma Denzell at once checked her loquacity.

Time rolled on, and the love I had borne my beautiful mother quickly and easily transferred itself to my grandmother.

Ah, who that knows can help loving her!—the "good lady" as *par excellence* she is denominated by all the poor of the country round. "Good lady," truly!—one of the most tender-hearted, pious, sweet-tempered beings in the whole wide world.

So it was, however, the possession of my small self was productive after a while, and for a while, of as much grief as joy to her feelings. The grief was generated of the joy, the which it tended to strengthen and increase with its own growth, as every passing year full of gentle judicious training and of Christian culture of my character rendered me companionable in mind and manners to my refined,

high-principled grandmother. I thereby became more and more endeared to her heart. Now, the source of this sorrow was contained in the programme laid down by my father for my first performances on the world's great stage, and of the certain and satisfactory carrying out of which no doubt seemed to have been entertained. To begin: I was to reside with his mother, Lady Denzell, until my seventeenth birthday, and during that period no trouble or expense were to be spared in polishing my manners and perfecting my education. Accomplishments were especially to be attended to; music and dancing ranking *next* in estimation, if not *beside* beauty and freshness of looks, in the Indian matrimonial field, and in the race there it was clear my father confidently expected I would greatly distinguish myself.

As can well be imagined, the thought of such a termination of all her holy strivings and wishes for my present and eternal happiness was a bitter grief ever present to the pure mind of my grandmother, and cast a shadow, that darkened to intensity, her every pleasure as the time approached. Ah, how often is the lot thus

cast into the lap—how often, often! and plans thus formed, destinies proposed, yet doomed to reach no fuller maturity than did these!

Ere the expiration of five years from the time of my leaving India my mother died; and fourteen months after my father took to himself the consolation of a second wife, in the person of a handsome buxom widow. This lady was already liberally endowed with offspring of her own, six children—five daughters, all older than myself, and a son. Three of the girls were then quitting school in England to join their mother; the education of the others was not yet completed.

As a natural consequence, over-possession of anything lessens, if not altogether destroys, its value; and so it was, the feeling of ambition which, when excited in my father's heart for *one* daughter, was light and pleasant, became heavy and irksome, under an enforced service for *five*. Nor did there seem a prospect of these matrimonial labours soon terminating, for the following year Lady Denzell, to the extreme vexation of my father, as shown in his letter to grandmamma announcing the evidently unwelcome news that his wife had presented

him with a seventh daughter,—yes, and the next year, imitating its predecessor, with an eighth. “Eight girls!” wrote my father; “was ever man so afflicted!” Now was the moment; and while the iron was thus at white heat grandmamma struck vigorously. Off went a letter containing a proposal, which, coming at such a time, could not fail of being acceptable. She was desirous, she said, to adopt me as her daughter, and thus would not only relieve him of the burden of one of his eight girls, but of all future expense and anxiety on her account. This was too generous and desirable an offer to be lightly rejected; and, strengthened no doubt in this opinion by my mother-in-law, he dispatched a willing and grateful acceptance of her proposal. And now our one great grief being removed—for I too had come to regard the threatened separation from grandmamma as, next to her death, the heaviest affliction that could befall me—she and I became two of the happiest, most contented people in all the country round.

CHAPTER II.

CHARLES BEECHLEY.

"AND then you will have completed your college education, and will come home for good. Isn't that it, Charley? How nice!"

"Not exactly, *ma petite*; I *leave* for good, but I do not *come* for good. That's the difference, Enny."

"What do you mean, Charles? I never understand half you say."

The latter laughed heartily, joyously. "I do not know anything that upsets my gravity equal to that look of yours, child. Those big brown eyes are such an amusingly picturesque illustration of the word 'perplexity' whenever you are puzzled. This is my meaning, however: It is not the fashion, pretty one, for men, when their education is, according to the

world's opinion, completed, to live at home under paternal, maternal, or grandmaternal care until some desirable party puts in an appearance and woos, wins, and carries off the prize to a wigwam of his own. Men's province is to go forth in the world, and fit themselves for such like performances—preparing to be the desirable party, as I must; and precious hard work many a fellow finds it, I can tell you.”

“I am not waiting for any one to come and marry me,” replied the first speaker, petulantly. “I would not leave dear grandmamma for any party, as you call them, in the world.”

A perfect roar of laughter followed this answer.

“You, you chicken! Why you are actually still in the very middle of the doll-and-pinafore era. *You* talk of marrying!”

Another burst of merriment stopped further utterance.

“I was not talking of marrying; I was talking of not marrying,” retorted the girl, blushing angrily. “And please remember I am not a child; I shall be twelve years old the fifteenth of this month: you don't call that a child, I should think?”

“Oh, of course not,” with continued laughter on one side and increasing indignation on the other.

I—Ennis Denzell—was the offended damsel ; the time, one month previous to the knowledge of my mother’s death ; and my companion was Charles Beechley, the rector’s only son. In age he was between nineteen and twenty, rather tall, very thin and bony, very pale, and his classically formed head covered with a profusion of very black curly hair. His features were large, but not handsome, though in general opinion the latter was more than atoned for by their bright and powerfully intellectual expression, especially the eyes, which were of a deep-blue grey.

I have read in the life of Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, that when under the influence of feelings of strong excitement his eyes emitted sparks of fire, as if struck from a flint, and this same phenomenon have I seen in Charles Beechley’s when conversing with grandmamma or others on some intellectual subject in which he delighted, or talking to grandmamma and me alone about his lovely young sister Edith, his playfellow, companion, and friend from

childhood, whose sad death had occurred a year previous to that of my present writing. Edith was as good and amiable as she was pretty, and I liked her much, better, indeed, than at that time I liked her sister Sariann, who was a year and a half older than Charles, and of a graver and more serious character than was Edith. Not that any great intimacy existed between myself and the latter; a wide difference in age, consequently in pursuits, feelings, and ideas, made such friendship incompatible, Edith Beechley being five years my senior; but her delicate health, extreme loveliness, and sweetness of manner warmly excited my interest and sympathy.

“How long a time is it since you alighted here from India, Enny? I quite forget,” resumed my companion.

“Five years,” replied I, in a pouting tone, the offensive laugh still ringing loudly in my ears.

“What a midge it was, to be sure, when first it appeared amongst us!” soliloquized my tormentor.

An indignant silence on my part.

“Look,” he continued, “do you see that

poor, tiny white flower? Well, just such a specimen of floral beauty were you."

"Was I? Then I must have been very pretty," I retorted, with angry gravity.

"Do you think so?" gathering the little wretch of a half-withered yellowish-white bud, and, after amusedly flaunting it close before my eyes, flipping me under the nose with it.

"Don't, Charles," exclaimed I, pettishly, and turning aside my flushed face. "You really seem to consider me even less than a child,—a mere baby."

"Sweet pretty thing!" he murmured, gazing at and apostrophizing the flower in tones of mock fondness and admiration, "you are a perfect emblem of her,—he-m! I mean of what she was. Yes; just such another interestingly blanched, scorched-up bit of vegetation as was that atom of humanity. I will keep you, pretty blossom,—he-m! keep you for the rest of my life, a memorial of the baby-phantom of bygone days." Saying which, he took out his purse, and tenderly placed the shrivelled bud within one of the enclosures. "You have no brothers or sisters, have you,

petite?” he presently questioned, changing his tone.

“None,” answered I, coldly.

“Only child of the great judge, Sir William Denzell! What an all-important affair it will be five years hence! Quite a princess in that land of fire and scorpions!”

“Yes,” replied I, somewhat mollified by this acknowledgment of my future importance, despite the questionable tone in which it was uttered, “I shall be quite a princess—a queen, indeed—in India.”

“Five years hence,” he repeated, thoughtfully, not heeding my last boastful words, and speaking in a voice in which all banter and gaiety had so entirely given place to a sad seriousness that, had I not become accustomed to these varying moods in Charles since Edith’s death, I should have been greatly astonished at this sudden alteration. “Where—how—and what shall we all be at the end of those long five years?” continued Charles. “What a crowd of events, of weal and woe, will throng the broad bridge of time spanning the space ’twixt this and then!”

“But we may all be just as we are now,

why not?" I interrupted. "Older, of course, and, I hope, wiser," I added, with a precocious wisdom, the result of constant companionship with persons older than myself, "but well and happy, as at the present, perhaps."

"Yes, we may all remain as we are; nevertheless chances against it weigh heavily in the opposition scale," he answered gravely.

"You are thinking of your mother," I said; all my childish anger dying out as thoughts of some of the stern realities of life, sickness, sorrow, and death, were brought to my mind by his words and manner. The accounts of my own darling mother had of late been far from satisfactory.

Mrs. Beechley too was a great invalid, and I was very partial to her, and Charles, who loved her devotedly, lived, I knew, in perpetual dread of losing her, as he had done his sweet little sister.

"Yes," he answered, "I am thinking of my mother—and—of others."

"Of grandmamma?" asked I, anxiously.

"Ye-s, of grandmamma too. She is old, and not strong for her age either."

I was completely sobered now.

"I don't want to go to India!" cried I, impetuously; "I should hate it! I want to live always with grandmamma. I know her best now; and—yes, I can't help it, I love her best!"

My eyes filled with tears as I spoke.

He looked at me with that powerful expression of earnestness in his face which always disconcerted me.

"Well, Enny, we know not what a day may bring forth. England may prove your abiding place after all. *Nous verrons.*"

It was a hot July morning, and Charles and I, while thus chatting, strolled leisurely through the picturesque grounds of Riversdale Court. Just now we followed a winding path, pleasantly shaded on one side by a broad belt of trees and shrubbery, while on the other stretched away, far as the eye could see, a succession of velvety lawns and smooth gravel walks, interspersed by thick plantations of evergreens and flowering shrubs, with every here and there a magnificent tree of at least a couple of hundred years' growth, whose deep, refreshing shade flowed far and wide over the heated earth.

Arrived at the house, Charles, who was still under dominion of the melancholy, thoughtful mood which had so suddenly clouded his cheerfulness, left me, and by a side gate entered the road leading to the Rectory.

CHAPTER III.

THE ORIEL DRAWING-ROOM.

THE evening of that day I sat as usual in my favourite place within a sort of alcove, if it may so be called—a recess; it was formed by the oriel window in one of a suite of sitting-rooms in Riversdale Court. A portion of the spacious window was wide open; for although the heat was abating as the shades of evening crept stealthily into wood and valley, and spread a thin veil of cool blue mist over the summits and slopes of the hills, the atmosphere continued very warm and sultry.

Chimes of the distant village bells, mingling with the song of birds, the fall of water, and other soft rural sounds, floated on the slow-moving air laden with perfume from myriads of

flowers, and within and without all seemed peace and beauty and restful enjoyment.

A very favourite apartment of grand-mamma's and mine was this dear old drawing-room, for in addition to the large oriel window there was another facing the south, equally broad and high, and of like antique construction ; thus in the coolest or hottest weather we could generally regulate the temperature by excluding or admitting the sunshine.

The view from both windows was charming, but especially the oriel, which looked down on a sweep of rich lawn, shrubbery, and trees, and terminated afar off in a wide sparkling lake, whose waters, partially concealed by intervening branches, glittered brightly and beautifully through the feathery foliage. This latter picturesque adornment, the lake, was of recent introduction, that is to say about two or three years before my coming to the Court. Prior to that period the mansion was encircled by a deep moat, whose waters were supplied by a stream which flowed in on one side and out at another. To this moat my grandfather, then living, but in extremely delicate health, conceived a dislike, believing—and no doubt with

good reason—that to the chill malaria arising at night, and during heavy weather, from its large body of almost standing water he owed much of his declining strength, turned off the tributary brook, dried up the bed of the moat, and planted it in every part with flowering shrubs and trees, which, nourished by the richest of soils, and sheltered on all sides, here grew and bloomed with almost Oriental luxuriance and beauty; while the stream, deprived of its noxious power, was made to do duty innocently by filling the aforesaid lake, which, too far off to be injurious to health, lay tranquilly and, as it seemed to my child's fancy, amiably smiling up at the sun and moon. A broad stone terrace clasped the whole length and the right and the left of the building, and opposite the oriel drawing-room a picturesque bridge spanned the moat (which at this point ran close under the terrace), and thus by an easy transit connected the house with the lovely grounds beyond.

Well, as I was telling you, I sat that evening in my favourite window, reading aloud (my constant custom) to grandmamma, who in her easy-chair was knitting a comforter, or some-

thing of that sort, for one or other of the many poor recipients of her bounty. She is before my mental vision now, as at that hour, and I will make you a little sketch of her. Here it is.

A charming-looking, pale, delicate old lady, rather below middle height, and of a most sweet, grave, gentle aspect. Very old she seemed to me; coeval, in fact, with all those ancient surroundings which harmonized so picturesquely with her appearance. I do not think, however, she was at that time more than two or three and fifty. I thought her a hundred at least, her movements were so slow in comparison to my hop, jump, and skip style of action; and her fine-grained silky hair lay, white as snow, braided on either side her broad, benevolent forehead, 'neath the equally snowy widow's cap. But I must stop here, for old Jeffry interrupted my mingled employment of reading and observing, to announce "Mr. Charles Beechley."

"I have come to wish you good-bye, grand-mamma, as I purpose setting off early to-morrow morning for Oxford," he exclaimed, in a kind voice, and addressing his old friend by

the familiar term of endearment which, half seriously, half playfully, he had adopted since my coming to Riversdale.

Seating himself between grandmamma and me, a merry conversation ensued, which presently turned on his college life and its approaching termination.

"I mean to be more than usually unsparing of my wits and abilities for the next six months, so they had better look to it," added Charles, gaily; "it will be no mere schoolboy's strength they will have to contend with, I can tell them, —my wits, I mean," smiling at me.

"According to Sariann's account of you, it never has been," I said, laughing.

"Do not overwork yourself, my dear boy," interrupted grandmamma, anxiously; "you have been looking far from well, lately—very pale, much paler than at your age you ought to look."

"Oh, that is nothing!" replied Charles, in the same joyous tone; "in fact, just the right sort of appearance for a bookworm. Who would believe me a working student if I presented such brilliant facings as Tom Hodges, your cowherd? No, you need not fear for me, grand

mamma; there never was a fellow required it less than I do! Why; positively I am a very marvel of health and strength!—nothing tires me, and nothing makes me ill; and instead of weaker I grow stronger. What more do I want?”

Grandmamma shook her head gravely, almost sorrowfully. “Remember, my dear boy, ‘the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong’; moreover, I do not think you such a pillar of strength as you thus unreflectingly consider yourself.”

He laughed his light, pleasant laugh upon meeting her scrutinizing eye, then said, more seriously,—

“Well, it will be but a short race, and a short fight, this time, after which I shall come home and triumphantly rest awhile on my laurels (you see I make quite sure of winning them), and be petted and flattered and spoilt in every conceivably delightful way, particularly by Enny, my little white bud,” he added, glancing mischievously at me as he laid his hand over the pocket containing the flattering emblem of myself gathered in the morning.

“Grandmamma says that excess in anything

seldom fails of defeating its own ends," observed I, sagely.

Charles laughed heartily. "Just so, little woman; take care, therefore, to bear that in mind next time you feel tempted to fly into a passion with Mistress Patterson when she refuses to give you any more toffy."

My cheeks burned, and I was on the point of attempting a self-vindication, which would certainly have produced me little or no good with my merry-hearted tormenter, when the entrance of servants and tea checked me.

Soon after my arrival in Riversdale, I became, to the great annoyance at first of all the old servants, the one object of most importance in the world to my grandmother. Customs of every kind, no matter of how long practice in the house, were made to at once succumb to the requirements of my fragile health, extreme youth, and the furtherance of my education and manners. Among other domestic arrangements was that of early hours, and thus it was we now sat down together to a six o'clock tea, in which Charles, who had only just dined with his family, could not of course share. Seating himself at the open window,

he looked out on the sweet view, and chatted the while.

“Ah, Enny!” he exclaimed, after a rather long silence, “you will never hear sounds in India comparable with those merry chimes and the singing of those birds. How delicious it all is!” he continued, in a low soliloquizing tone, leaning out, the better to listen and see, “the bells, the birds, the rushing, murmuring water, the golden sunset—everything, everything!”

Often since have I recalled to memory those happy, contented words, and the light-spirited look accompanying them; yes, and that mellow, peaceful evening. Many, many more as sweet, warm and pleasant have come and gone with my girlhood’s past, forgotten, unmarked, as though they had not been; but this stands out still another of those little verdant islands on a boundless waste of waters.

CHAPTER IV.

EXTRACTS FROM SARIANN'S DIARY.

As far back as I can remember I have written a diary—a brief, crude account of divers events in my every-day life; some are of great, some of small importance, as the case may be.

My mother was the only child of a Scotch clergyman living in one of the midland counties of Scotland: her parents, strict, rigid Calvinists of the old school, were, albeit, gentle, true-hearted Christian folk. They dearly loved the one little daughter granted to their wedded life; so dearly that, with pained reluctance, they consented to her marriage with the Rector of Riversdale; albeit he was all, as regardeth this world and the next, their anxious hearts could desire in a son-in-law. But, alas! the future home of their beloved daughter would

lie far distant from her native land; and this was their exceeding grief.

A year after the marriage Charles was born; anon, in eighteen months, I came; then Edith made her appearance the year following. Now, so it was, so greatly did I resemble my mother even from babyhood, that the hearts of my Puritan grandfather and grandmother opened out to me with a warmth and love which neither Charles nor Edith could excite.

In the fifth year of my age the two former, who had been sojourning awhile in Riversdale with my parents, carried me back with them to Scotland. My proposed sojourn in their house was for a month; but, so it turned out, I tarried on and on for many months, and anon for years.

I had reached my seventeenth birthday when, to my great grief, my kind old grandfather died. His death was sudden; and so terrible was the shock to his aged partner that, in a few months, she joyfully—yea, joyfully, for what further value had earthly existence for one so bereaved?—followed her husband to that happy land whither she knew he was but gone before

and was awaiting her coming. Anon I returned to my rectory home, my heart aching sadly for my double loss.

Much amused were they all after a while, within and without the house, by the quaint and primitive fashion of my speech and my somewhat stiff dress and manner. Often offended was I by Charley's saucy mimicry and his appellation of little Puritan, the which clung to me for a long space. But the faculties of youth are quick of perception and pliant, and my talk speedily assumed the modern style of those with whom I now consorted.

Albeit, ever dear to me will be the simple language of my good pious grandparents; wherefore, in these my private communings and descriptions, I delight myself in adopting, in English, not Scotch dialect, the bygone phraseology of my beloved and honoured relatives,—in a measure, that is. Having writ thus much of the past, I will now proceed with present daily accounts after the manner of the original portion of my manuscript.

What a joyous, happy-hearted fellow dear Charley is! and so clever! As yet, the whole

of his college life has been one great success, which, together with his frank, kindly spirit, has made him a favourite with all the principals, and beloved of those friends he hath chosen for himself to consort with.

His letters home are delightful, witty, interesting, and full of humorous descriptions of every conceivable kind. Mostly are they writ to mother, whom he doats upon, as she does on him. Fondly attached to each other also are he and Edith, betwixt whom exists a kindred mind of sympathy on every point. She, too, like Charles, possesses a soul of quick imaginative powers, bright and intelligent.

Of late I have noted, and it grieves me to the heart to see, how thin and white, yea, and weakly Edith is growing. Two years back—nay, little more than one—she was fresh to look upon, lightsome and blooming as a just opening rose-bud. Ah me! why now does she begin more to resemble a drooping lily? Her temper, too, before so sweet and equable, is oftentimes irritable and uncertain, and her hopeful nature sad and desponding. What does it mean? Alas! what does it mean?

She maketh no plaint, poor pretty creature! —is vexed if aught of remark is passed upon her delicate looks, declaring she feels well, yea, quite well.

Poor father and mother are perplexed and troubled, as am I, at this change in their lovely daughter (Edith is very lovely); and, quoth father, "If she improves not shortly, I shall do as Charles advises, and take her to London to see some eminent physician."

Charles is not so mirthsome in spirit as heretofore; he strives to appear the same in Edith's presence, albeit I see his eyes furtively following her graceful bending form with grave expression as she moves to and fro the room and garden.

"What ails my little Edy?" he questioned of me; "can you tell, Sariann? Is it *love* do you think—a secret, hopeless love—or is it, is it"—his manly cheek paled, and his voice grew husky and low—"is it *death*?"

A load, as of a leaden weight, fell on my heart at these words, which so fearsomely seconded mine own dread.

It was summer. One warm sunny day we

three, to wit, Charles, Edith, and myself, were in the garden.

At the far end, beyond sight of the house, stood a pleasant shady seat, whereon we two damsels sat, doing some small matters in needle-work, the while Charles wandered hither and thither, or stopped and held converse with us as pleased him. Out of the common, silent and sorrowful was Edith to-day. Saith Charles, abruptly, and in a voice that trembled somewhat,—

“Edith, what is the matter with you? Tell me the whole truth: I must and will know, for I cannot bear this suspense any longer!”

She started, and raised her big blue eyes to his with a half-frightened look—eyes of that azure blue which belongeth only to youth.

“Matter with me, Charley? What do you mean?” quoth she, evasively.

“I mean what has changed you so much within the last year? You are not a bit like your old self, like what you used to be. You were once my jolliest, merriest little friend and companion, but now, now—and why are you become so pale? All your pretty colour gone, and you are grown so thin. I can’t bear it,

Edie, that's the long and the short of the matter!—it makes me wretched! Look at this!" grasping her slender white hand in his, and holding it forth for my inspection.

Hastily she withdrew it, and, covering her face, suddenly burst into such a convulsion of weeping and sobbing as I had never heard the like of, and that shook her whole form with the violence of an ague fit. God grant I may never hear aught so heart-rending again!

"Oh, Edie, Edie! don't! don't!" gasped I, terrified exceedingly; and, casting my arms around her, drew her head to my bosom, and joined my tears to hers.

Charles gazed awhile, speechless, at the mischief he had so unwittingly wrought; then strode to and fro.

Presently with a strong effort the dear thing controlled herself, and sat up and wiped her soft eyes, and anon lovingly stretched out her hand to Charles, and in a sweet, sad voice, broken by many a deep-drawn catch in her breath, she said,—

"Dear Charley, I am so sorry to have distressed you in this way—it was silly and selfish; but oh, when I thought of all, when

I think of all, I could not, I cannot help it! I will tell you all,—yes, all; it will be better, and I ought to do so—I know I ought.”

She stopped a minute, breathing quick and hard, pressing her hand to her side; then she went on hurriedly,—

“For a long while I felt I was ill—quite two years, but I paid no heed to it; the feelings were so trifling—not worth attending to, I thought: this was in the beginning. They went on increasing, however—the feelings I mean—on and on—”

“What feelings, dear?” I asked, inwardly trembling for the answer.

“The pain—sometimes in my side, sometimes in my chest; but oftenest in the first, and sleepless nights, sleepless, very constantly, because when I lay down the pain worried me more. And everything I did began to make me so tired, and does now, the shortest walk even. Oh, so tired, and breathless—”

“Edie, why did you not tell us all this before!” cried I in an agony. “Oh, it was cruel of you not to do so!”

“Who could I tell it to, dear Sariann? You were seldom at home, excepting for a few days

at a time, and I had no heart, no courage, to talk about myself then. Ah me! if you had been always with me it might have—but there, such regrets are worse than useless.”

My sigh was almost a moan over the truth of those words; how I wished then, and wish now, that I had never left my home to live in Scotland!

“But, mamma,” urged I, “why not tell her?”

“Oh, I could not bring myself to say anything likely to distress poor mamma, she is so delicate. Besides, I was not sure you know at that time there really was much seriously the matter with me—if anything the matter at all, indeed. I looked strong and well then. I was neither thin nor pale, and my appetite so good that papa often laughed at the quantity I ate; it was a common observation how blooming and healthy I was. Altogether I felt ashamed of telling any one I thought myself ill, knowing they would only regard it as a girlish whim.”

“Surely, Edith, you might have confided in me,” broke forth Charles, in an agitated voice; “but what blindness possessed me and dulled

my faculties, that I never discovered it for myself, I cannot conceive."

"But what makes you think you are really ill, darling?" quoth I. "Oh, God mercifully grant you may after all be mistaken!"

Secretly, as is my wont under every tribulation, I sent a petition to my Heavenly Father for support, for my heart shrank from her answer; albeit, for the dear thing's sake, I resolved to learn the truth.

Edith shook her head; then she said drearily,—

"No, Sariann, I am not mistaken; would that I were!—for all your beloved sakes, far more than my own, would that I were! No; what I thought at first I know now."

Anon she stopped, and looked at Charles, her sweet face full of a loving sister's regretful tenderness.

"One day," she spoke reluctantly, glancing alternately at Charles and me—"one day I was walking with papa, and we met a lady who had not long come to Riversdale. You know her—Mrs. Irskin—and she began almost at once talking of her niece, whom she seemed exceedingly grieved and anxious about—a girl

of my age," she added, looking scrutinizingly at me—"who they feared was dying of consumption. Then, upon papa's gently suggesting the possibility that the girl's over-anxious friends might be mistaken, she entered into a lengthened detail of the symptoms slowly but surely developing themselves in her, and as I listened I felt like one receiving her death-warrant; every point in the description exactly tallied with my feelings. Yes—now I know—consumption; like poor Alice Irskin, I too was dying slowly of consumption."

Charles sat down beside Edith on the bench, and, resting his elbows on his knees, bent his face upon his hands.

"How long ago was this?" I asked, in a choking voice.

"About six months. Mrs. Irskin then went on to say she intended taking her niece the next day to Mandelow, to consult a doctor of great eminence residing there, who was especially famous for his knowledge in all lung and chest diseases—Dr. Mardyke. Well, after that I was so miserable! It was such a heavy, dreary secret to bear about with me unassisted. I too was in a consumption; I, too, was dying!

Papa and mamma thought me in good health ; how could I undeceive them ! Sometimes I ventured to complain of being tired, but they only laughed and said I was always lazy when Charley was away. Oh, they little understood what a gnawing, sinking sensation of fatigue every exertion cost me ! When I said I was always hungry, eat what I might, 'Just the right thing,' poor papa declared, 'I was growing tall, and needed propping up well.' Even the pains in my side and back, which I one evening mentioned to old nurse Mary, were, she assured me, of no consequence, being merely growing pains, and all young girls were subject to them. At last I began to hope there really was little or nothing the matter with me. The symptoms of ill health I suffered might be the same in feeling and appearance as those of Alice Irskin, but might they not result from a wholly different cause—a cause containing no absolute danger ? This reflection comforted me for a while ; but at the termination of another month my fast-increasing ill health told me only too plainly I was deluding myself with false hopes. Just about this time grandpapa invited papa and mamma to pay

them a visit in Scotland; and they accordingly went. And now a sudden resolve seized me: I would—yes—I too would see, and consult Dr. Mardyke. I would insist upon knowing the truth, and thus terminate this painful uncertainty on the subject of my failing health; if, in fact, it was failing: but that was the dark point I determined if possible to clear up.

“Remembering that Mrs. Irskin had said Thursday was one of his reception-days for patients in his own house, I accordingly put off my governess with the excuse I was going to pay a visit, and should be absent till late, and, saying the same to the servants, got into the public coach one Thursday morning, and was driven to Windlake station; the distance, you know, from there to Mandelow is not great.”

Charles had raised his pale face at this part of Edith's narrative, an expression of blank astonishment in all his features.

“To think of you, delicate, timid creature, going through all that by yourself!” he interposed, passionately, “and ill, too, as you were. Oh, Edith, why did you do it?”

She made no answer; her mind seemed so

absorbed by the painful memories of that day. I thought she did not understand him, as she resumed, wearily,—

“I scarcely recollect how I got there; but soon I was in the house, and in the presence of the great doctor, and directly I saw him I felt convinced he was just the man from whom I could with little difficulty obtain the knowledge I had come for.”

“Yes, he gave it to poor Alice Irskin heartlessly and readily enough,” rejoined Charles, with angry bitterness.

“He is a very plain man,” continued Edith, half abstractedly, “of middle age, middle height, and broad-shouldered, sturdy figure. His hair is carrotty red, yellowish-white skin, thick features, ugly little, keen, surly blue eyes, and a rather low, broad, square forehead—a forehead of much intellectual cleverness, with very little tenderness of character, sympathy or compassion for the distresses of others. This was my first impression of him.

“I declared at once the motive of my visit; I simply wished to learn his true opinion of my case—nothing more. If I had mistaken the symptoms, and they proceeded from no serious

cause, medicine would be unnecessary ; if, on the contrary, my condition was as desperate as I at present suspected it to be, medicine would be useless—worse than useless.

“ He had not yet spoken, and still remained silent, his disagreeable little sharp eyes looking me through and through. At last he said, shortly and bluntly,—

“ ‘ Are you engaged to be married ? ’

“ Such style of question would, under other circumstances, have disconcerted me. As it was, the only idea that now struck my mind was, if he believed my anxiety to ascertain the state of my health arose from that cause, the being engaged, he might roughly consider it his duty to enlighten me, supposing he saw my case to be hopeless. I therefore said gravely I had particular reasons for wishing to know the decided truth, and begged as a great favour he would conceal nothing from me, adding it would be the height of mistaken kindness if he did.

“ This answer, and the colour I felt burning in my cheeks, confirmed him in his suspicion. He said nothing more, however, but proceeded to examine my lungs through a little tube-instrument.”

"A stethoscope," interrupted Charles.

"A stethoscope," repeated Edith, mechanically, "and to test their strength and soundness in every (I suppose) medical way. He did it carefully, the hard, serious expression peculiar in his face and voice increasing in hardness and seriousness, the while he desired me to say certain words, or cough, &c. In conclusion he asked several questions, which I answered freely; then he sat back, silent, and tapping the table thoughtfully with his fingers, gazing fixedly at me the while.

"'Well, doctor,' I said presently and smiling—the ghost of a smile it must have been—'what is my sentence—life or death?'

"'The truth is, young lady,' he began, reluctantly, and with a gentle kindness of voice and look I had not believed him capable of, 'your health is in a very precarious state, far more delicate than from your appearance I at first thought, but—'

"'Tell me all, doctor,' I interrupted, earnestly. Oh, how I longed to terminate this dreadful interview! I could not bear it much longer, I felt sure. 'I have reasons for wishing to know,' I again urged. 'Please answer these

questions unreservedly, as though you were speaking of some one else, not myself. Am I in a consumption ?'

" 'Ye-s, but—'

" 'Are my lungs seriously diseased ? I will know, Dr. Mardyke,' I rejoined, hastily, as he hesitated in his reply: 'I have come for that express purpose. Do not waste your valuable time, therefore, in trifling with the direct truth.'

" The anteroom was crowded with patients when I came in, and knocks and rings at the door bespoke a continuation of arrivals.

" 'Well, if you are so determined to know, I suppose I had better end the matter by telling you,' he replied, speaking in an almost angry tone. 'I conclude your motive is a good and an urgent one, or you could hardly, at your age, be so singularly merciless to yourself. Yes, your lungs are seriously diseased.'

" 'Tell me all, doctor,' I again entreated, feeling as if an east wind had suddenly cut through my whole body ; for by his manner I saw that the much he had confessed was nothing to that he still concealed.

" 'The all is this, then, child, since you will

have it,' he rejoined, with unmistakably distressed impatience; 'and perhaps it is better you should know the truth now than later,' he continued. 'The fact is your lungs are so mortally impaired I marvel you have kept as well as you are. You have but one lung left, and that is far gone in disease; the other is past being of the slightest respiratory use.'

"Then, of course, I cannot live long?' I managed to say.

"Not in England,' he replied, kindly. 'You must go to a warm, dry climate.'

"Thank you, Doctor Mardyke; that is sufficient,' I answered, rising. I felt half stunned, dazed; for, resolved though I was to know my fate, I had in truth clung more firmly to hope than at all aware of. I now seemed as if moving and speaking in my sleep; but I know I was very calm and, fortunately, self-controlled. 'Thank you, Doctor Mardyke, for the trouble you have taken, and for so honestly telling me the truth,' I said, handing him his fee. He would not take it.

"Will you not allow me to prescribe for you?' he asked, in tones so softened and

pitying they sounded strangely at variance with his appearance. 'Bear in mind,' he added, 'that even in the most extreme cases, when medicine is unable to absolutely cure, it frequently possesses a miraculous power in arresting, or rather retarding, the progress of disease.'

" 'No, thank you,' I answered despairingly; 'my case is a hopeless one. I see that, and I will not take advantage of your kindness to trouble you further.'

"He held out his hand to me, and mechanically I put mine into it. His was so warm; mine cold as ice, and he retained it in his firm grasp, saying gently,—

" 'Where do you live?'

"I told him, and who my father was.

" 'Dr. Beechley!' he repeated in surprise. 'I know him well by name. Well, think over what I have advised with regard to remedies, and tell your father to bring you to see me again.'

"I shook my head. 'Nothing would come of it, doctor, but painful trouble, expense, and bitter disappointment. I know two or three cases now, similar to my own. Miss Irskin,

for instance—she is under your care, and dying as fast as I am!’

“Again I offered him a fee, but he silently shook his head, and bowed gravely. Then I left him and his dreadfully gloomy house, as it seemed to my numbed senses, and returned home.”

As Edith concluded this doleful account, I involuntarily looked up at poor Charles, my own heart full of unutterable anguish, for I dearly love my sweet young sister. His countenance was of a ghastly whiteness, even to his lips; but he said nought. He had covered his face with his hands as before, his head bent with grief, and thus he remained a long space. Poor Charles! he does so doat upon Edith—“his jolly little chum,” as he calls her. Ah, never again will that term pass his lips!

Pale and woebegone sat the gentle maiden, gazing abstractedly o’er the bright flower-decked garden; albeit she seemed not to notice aught present, her mournful azure eyes looking, as it were, into futurity.

“Might he not be wrong?” I murmured, presently. “Oh, Edith! he is but a mortal man—Dr. Mardyke, I mean—might he not

have altogether mistaken your case? You know what fatal errors the cleverest medical men sometimes commit!"

She shook her head mournfully.

"No, dear Sariann, I feel he is right; besides, think of his age and experience; think of the years of practice he has had, and of the hundreds of patients he has prescribed for, suffering from every species of chest complaint—every kind of consumptive disease."

Weeks have passed since that day in the garden—that bright albeit one of the most darkly dismal days in Charles's and my life.

We all know now—the whole household—aye, the whole village and neighbourhood, know of the great sorrow that has fallen upon us. We are striving, too, to bend our stubborn wills to that of our heavenly Father—all save Charles; his soul cannot, will not submit to its load of grief; and he distresses me exceedingly by his oft assertion that he does not believe that God has aught to do with this passing away of our beloved sister.

"It is the malicious work of the devil," saith he, "who delights to drive poor, weak humanity

to desperation, and through that perchance to crime and ruin."

As thus he one day spoke a look came into his eyes that perplexed and distressed me as much as did his words. I could not think what was the feeling in his soul to produce it.

But, thanks to our heavenly Father, no one is now so cheerfully patient as beauteous Edith.

"It is God's will," says the dear child; "let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Howbeit we could not rest content with only Dr. Mardyke's opinion; therefore poor father carried her up to London to consult a doctor there, famous for such-like diseases. But, alas! no whit more comforting was the judgment of this same great man than was that of Dr. Mardyke. In every instance they agreed, even to the sending her to a distant land—a land which in the bleak "English" winter season would be all sunshine and warmth, and help, under the blessing of God, to prolong her precious life, if aught of human means could do so. And, ah, yes! who knows,—who can tell, save the great Creator of all things, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, whether the breathing an atmosphere of perpetual

summer—returning only during that season to her native land—may not prove the blessed means of preserving her to us for years to come? Who knows? By such like hopeful talk do I strive to cheer her young spirit, and, forsooth, mine own also, and exceedingly it rejoiceth me to see that she is getting a more sanguine heart in the matter. Pray God I am not doing unwisely!

“It is not as if I were going away by myself, you know, dear Sariann,” said she, as yesterday noon we sat together in the garden—not on that bench whereon she told us her doleful story—nor Charles nor I could afterwards bear the sight thereof, and speedily he moved it elsewhere: “darling mamma’s going with me will make it a delightful undertaking, and the more so because papa says that the benefit, from the change, to her own delicate health will, with God’s blessing, be invaluable to her—a change which nothing would have induced her to seek on her own account merely. Dear, sweet mammy,” concluded Edith, lovingly, “like you, darling Sariann, she is one of the most unselfish of human beings.”

“Like me? Oh, Edie! there is no com-

parison between us! 'Everything for her husband and children, nothing for herself,' that ought to be dear mother's motto," exclaimed I.

"Sariann," said Edith, following me this evening into my bedroom, as is sometimes her wont, to give me a good-night embrace, "I am going to make you an earnest request."

My heart throbbed tumultuously in fear of what was coming. She made me sit down beside her on a sofa, and for a brief space was silent, resting her thin white hands, clasped in each other, on her lap, and gazing thoughtfully before her.

"What is it, dear?" said I, timorously.

"There is one prayer I always offer up for myself," she went on, slowly and hesitatingly, "and I want you, dear sister, night and morning, to add it to your devotions."

"Yes, dear?"

"I cannot describe to you," she resumed presently, "how much I dread and shrink from pain and bodily suffering of every kind; it is weak and cowardly, I know, it is perhaps even sinful, not to strive against such rebellious feelings; but I am powerless to do so, utterly

powerless, mentally and physically. I have the greatest horror of a long sickness confining me to my bed; the harrowing thought of the beloved, sorrowing faces watching and sympathizing with my every distress, and wasting their own health and strength endeavouring to restore mine. But it is cruel in me to make you unhappy by speaking in this dismal way," she added more lightly, looking tenderly in my face, and reading there the sinking of heart her doleful words had occasioned: "I am, I know, a sufficient cause of sadness and trouble without that. No, I will come at once to the point, which is this: the one prayer I offer in particular, and continually, is that if God, in His divine wisdom, still sees fit to take me away while yet so young, He will at least spare me a long, suffering illness—will, in pitying consideration for my poor bodily weakness, remove me *speedily*, without pain or mental distress. This is my constant petition; and now promise me, Sariann—dear, kind Sariann!—promise to also add it to your devotions, night and morning. Don't refuse me, dearest, for oh! it will make me so happy if you say you will! You are, and always have been, so

good and pious, and have served God so faithfully all your life, I know you have, that He will, I feel sure, grant any request of yours."

Overpowered by divers painful thoughts and feelings, I could not speak at first; moreover, should I be doing right in the sight of our heavenly Father in granting her petition?

"Promise me! promise!" pleaded the poor child, her beauteous blue eyes gazing into mine with such a wistful earnestness that I could not resist their appeal longer.

"Yes, I promise, dear," replied I, in a very broken voice. But little heeded Edith the manner of my grant; she caught and kept the words it contained,—that was enough.

Bright as a summer sunbeam became her sweet, flushed face, as, casting her arms around me, she pressed her soft rosebud mouth to my cheek.

"Thank you! dear, dear, dear Sariann! Now I shall be happy! quite happy; for I know your prayer will be heard, and, if need be, granted!"

Charles has not been home more than a week.

Ah! his presence does not cheer me! Alas, no! He has cast me down very low; and, poor fellow, he is cast down himself also, yea, perchance more hopelessly low than I am. Saith he to me, in sad and bitter tones,—

“Edie looks worse than when I left—much worse! That old fellow, that old Mardyke, is right; he told us she was dying, and she is dying fast! How shall we ever be able to bear it! What will this house—oh, what will the world—be without dear, bright little Edie!” and with a groan, as if his heart was breaking, he rose and strode rapidly to and fro.

For some minutes I could not speak; then I said,—

“Oh, Charles, what makes you say that? What makes you think she looks worse? I thought her better; we all thought her so—father, and mother, and every one in the house, and—”

“Better!” quoth he, stopping and staring at me with impatient amazement. “Why, where are your usually clear senses gone, Sariann? Better! with those unnaturally, distressingly bright, glittering eyes, that feverish, hectic spot in each cheek?”

"But her spirits are so much improved," I faltered, "and she is certainly stronger."

"Ah," said he, mournfully, "merely the liveliness and false strength of excitement resulting from hopes destined never to be realized in this miserable world"; and again he sighed, and paced hither and thither.

Just then came floating in through the window on the soft summer air the sweet, sadly sweet notes and words of that most pathetic of all Scotch songs,—

Ye banks and braes of bonny Doon,
How can ye look so blithe and fair! &c.

Yes, Charles is right. The hidden source from whence flowed the tones of a voice so fraught with doleful reproaches was not one of health or real joy. But so it is; and, oh! I feel thankful for the same, all delusive though it is. The dear songstress is herself unconscious of her state. Her heart, as mine was—alas! was—is brightened by the flowers of hope, and remembers no more the darksome sepulchre o'er which they are blooming.

Presently steps came along the gravel path, and anon a winsome face, the glittering golden

curls falling back like a veil around a head surmounted by a comely hat and feathers, peeped in at the open window.

"Oh, Charley, there you are, you lazy boy! Why do you not come into the garden? I have been expecting you this long time," cried a gleeful voice.

"Have you, lady fair? Well, here I am, then," said Charles, with assumed cheerfulness, laying his hand on the window-sill as he lightly jumped out. "Come along, little one."

Clasping her two hands lovingly within his arm, together they strolled away and were soon lost to my sight, albeit I drew nigh the window and watched them with, ah me! such an aching heart.

The summer commenced early this year, a bright, glorious summer, which has not yet, by any untoward change, disappointed our expectations, albeit the middle of July has already arrived; so greatly had Edith revived under its genial influence that our hearts filled high with hope. How mine are dashed down after Charles's foreboding words of this morning I leave you to judge.

"Mamma dear, Charley and I are planning to have a small family picnic," said Edith this evening, as she and I and mother sat together in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Are you, darling?" quoth the latter, in a dubious tone. "Will that be prudent, Edie? Suppose while you are out the weather should suddenly change, become wet and cold, and you, my precious child, far distant from home?"

"Oh, we intend making the most careful provision against evils of every possible and impossible kind, dear mammy, so you need not be at all anxious," pleaded Edith, running and sitting down on a stool at mother's feet (a way methinks she has learned from that comely damsel, Ennis Denzell), and laying her soft cheek on her hand coaxingly. Ah, full of winsome, loving ways is little Edie—ways and looks which open out every heart to take her in at once. "Charley will be the manager, director, and so forth," continued she, "and you know he is not likely to allow any mischief to befall me; so say 'yes,' dear mammy; we only want your permission, and shall then set to work with our preparations," and, resting

her two arms on mother's knees, she looked up pleadingly.

No better able to resist the pleading of those azure eyes was our dear parent than I had been on a recent occasion, and, with caressing hand smoothing Edie's silky head, the "yes" was yielded, albeit reluctantly.

Thereupon the day is fixed for next Friday (this is Tuesday evening), and ofttimes will the thermometer be consulted 'twixt this and then, and liberally admonished by continuous raps and taps to keep where it at present is—"Set fair."

Dora and Lucy Bell, and their brother, who has just entered the army, albeit still very young, too young, methinks, for such responsibility, and Ennis Denzell, will, with ourselves, comprise the party. Howbeit, I hear Ennis cannot come, and this morning (Wednesday) Charles rode to Grange Court, the seat of General and Mrs. Layton, to invite their daughter, an amiable damsel of three-and-twenty, to join our party, and also her brother, Robert Layton. There are but two children, and the latter, an intimate friend of Charley's, has only just quitted college. The brother and sister gladly

accepted the invitation, and methinks our little party will be a most judiciously chosen company of young pleasure-seekers.

A month has passed since last I looked at my diary. A sad, sad month! Oh, dear me! it seems as though all sunshine has left my heart, my home, aye, and the whole world, in that brief time. Well, I will go back. I have written nought of the picnic, so here it is.

Radiant was the morning of our intended expedition, and spirits one and all were blithesome as the weather. Yes, despite the re-opening of my eyes by Charles to see the fearsome sword suspended by a single hair, a single hair, over our heads, even I felt soothed again by hope as I stood listening to Edie's gleeful tones, and watched her graceful figure as she flitted around the carriage, aiding Charles and Robert Layton in packing and arranging it for our departure. She was unusually bright and strong this morning. Was this nought but a delusive strength, the effervescence of feverish excitement? I would not think so,—no, I would not think so; she looked so like her old self once more.

Mr. Layton, Edith, I, and George Bell went in our one-horse carriage; Charles, Mistress Layton, and Dora and Lucy in the Bells' barouche—a large, handsome vehicle.

Robert Layton, an Apollo in form and face, straightway fell in love with Edie, and devoted himself to her all that day. She, nothing loth, responded to the same in her many bewitching ways, and they merrily chaffed each other, and chatted, and even gambolled in a modest sort, and laughed. Ah me! how we young folk did laugh and talk that day!

The place we had selected for our sojourn, Leighwood, lay about five miles distant from Riversdale, and through a very beauteous country. It possessed many advantageous spots whereon to bivouac, and there were besides several little cottages scattered hither and thither, whereat small necessities, to wit, hot water, teacups and saucers, &c., could be obtained. But the grand fun, so all declared, would be to end our gipsying entertainment by making the fire, boiling the water, and, as Charley said, concocting tea in Bohemian fashion for ourselves. Finally, everybody went to work with a will, and truly the activity,

ingenuity, and skill in devising, displayed in building up this impromptu kitchen fire, was curious and pleasant to see. The laughter and confusion of tongues exceeded all which had gone before; and in good sooth there had been no lack throughout.

"I declare this is fifty times jollier than if we had twenty flunkies to do it all for us; don't you think so, Edith?" quoth Robert Layton, in that lower, more tender tone which the poor lad had already arrived at in addressing my sweet sister.

"Edith" too! and this was the first day of their acquaintance. Forsooth, intimacy had lost no time in gaining for itself a positive position.

"Oh, yes!" responded the maiden, "fifty times jollier!" smiling brightly at her adoption of the latter word, as kneeling on the ground she, with her dainty ungloved hands, poked the sundry pieces of stick and dry grass, supplied her by Master Bob, into the fire to speed its burning,—*"fifty times pleasanter,"* she added. "In my opinion half the real fun of picnics is destroyed by the arrangements being all made so luxurious and easy that one almost forgets

one is in a wood instead of a dining-room."

"Exactly so: you have just hit it!" replied young Layton, as he energetically broke a substantial-sized stick athwart his knee with reckless disregard of injured habiliments.

He would not allow himself to be outdone in feats of rusticity by his delicate little lady-love; and methought that "Exactly; you have just hit it!" would have been quite as willingly accorded to a totally opposite opinion of Edith's on the same matter.

As though of but yesterday's occurrence does that sweet evening scene haunt my memory. A green space on the edge of Leighmoor, surrounded and shaded by foliage, and opening into Leighwood, which was chosen for our encampment—a merry little company collected therein, who, with mirthful chatter, were occupied in divers ways getting ready the tea—is the picture left on my mental vision, the which neither time nor circumstance can ever efface.

So sped on the pleasant hours until Charles declared Edith must now hie her home; for the day was falling, and soon would heavy dews

follow such hot weather, the which might be greatly harmful to her.

"Oh, Charley, this is just the most enjoyable time!" she pleaded; "let me stay one hour more—or half an hour even; do, dear Charley!"

But Charles wisely withstood her winsome, caressing entreaties.

"No, little one," said he, "not a quarter of an hour; you have lingered too late already—close on the verge of imprudence, so be quick, be quick: the rest of the party can remain with impunity, if so minded; but you cannot and must not."

Thereupon all protested they had had enough of pleasuring for that day, and should return also; and Edith laughed her soft laugh, and glanced at the youth, Layton, saying shyly,—

"Well, what must be must be, so there is no help for it."

"The place would change into a dreary wilderness to me without your bright presence," I heard him murmur fondly in her ear: "catch me stay a moment if *you* go!"

"Would you not?" quoth she, gazing at him a brief space with a sad and wistful look in her azure eyes, and the delicate colour

coming and going in her cheeks: "and yet I am now only returning home; what if I went away altogether?"

"Away altogether? What do you mean, Edie?" said Robert, a deep flush spreading itself over his face also.

To think how, in so short a time, the hearts of these two unreflecting young folks had—scarcely consciously to themselves—gone forth to each other, and already silently entered into a sort of love-compact!

Just then came Charles with divers warm wraps for Edith, and anon a general break-up and preparation for departure followed. Edie became busy and active as the rest, settling this thing and that; howbeit Master Robert made very lightsome her labours by reason of his continued assistance.

Our wearied bodies and subdued spirits, consequent on the exertions of the day and heat of the atmosphere, were in meet condition to greatly enjoy the restful drive to Riversdale through the quiet flowery lanes and bean-scented air.

George Bell preferred returning with us, he said, and, as his conversation was mostly

bestowed upon me the while we drove home, my little sister and Master Bob had it much to themselves to yet further bewitch each other by their boy and girl blandishments.

“I shall ride over to-morrow to see how you are, after this jolly day’s work and fun,” said he in a low tone, as tenderly he helped her from the carriage.

“Yes, do,” she made answer, with a bright smile and blush.

He watched her retreating form as lightly she passed on to the house, and raised his hat, his eyes kindling in glad response to the shy farewell glance and nod she turned and cast him back ere entering the door. Anon he mounted the horse brought for him by his groom, and rode away.

He came the next day—aye, came at mid-day—but he never saw her again. Ah me! that sparkling, lovely, living thing of only a few hours before now lay—stiff and cold and dead! Alas! all too much for her waning strength had been the day’s toil and excitement.

That night while seated at supper she fainted right away; albeit this lasted not long, and speedily her soft eyes, in which the brightness had strangely vanished, opened, and she smiled—a most mournful smile, though lovingly meant to comfort us.

“I am better now,” said she, presently—
“much better; but, oh, so tired! I never felt so tired before, and should like to go to bed.”

Charles—poor Charles—his face white as Edie's, and full of bitter forebodings, gathered her in his strong arms and bore her to her room. Mother and I quickly got her into bed, and while yet a murmured prayer lingered on her lips she fell asleep. I left her not, but, lying on a sofa in the chamber, likewise slept awhile.

At dead of night Edith called to me. She had been awake a long time, she said, and did not like to disturb me. She was very ill, and was getting worse: she knew not what ailed her.

“Oh, Sariann!” quoth she, presently, casting around me her arms, and speaking in quivering tones, “is this *it*? Is this—death?”

She sank back, and methought she had again fainted.

Soon were all gathered around the bed, striving and watching for tokens of returning life. Howbeit they came not; no, the gentle spirit had gone to heaven—gone to its eternal rest and peace and joy—gone without a pang or a sigh; and thus did the great God pityingly, tenderly grant her girl's weak prayer. Oh, this is a sad, sad time! My page is wet with tears as I write, and for awhile—it may perchance be a long while—I must lay aside my journal.

I am reading the words I last wrote—"It may perchance be a long while." Verily it is a long while—nearly two years! Thanks be to our heavenly Father, time—blessed time—hath so ground down the keen, jagged edges of our great sorrow that we can now bear to softly handle the past, and look forward in cheerful hopefulness to a reunion in the future with our beloved ones.

Next week Charles leaves college. Oh, it will be a right happy thing to have him—dear, joyous, noble-hearted fellow—always with us!

He is to take Holy Orders, and assist our father as curate, until such time as the former is unable to longer carry the weight of kirk duties; whereupon Charles will become Rector of Riversdale; for so have ruling powers decided.

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

TIME flowed on smoothly, uneventfully, in Riversdale during the six months of Charles Beechley's absence. My studies had, meanwhile, progressed to dear, grandmamma's satisfaction under the combined tuition of an amiable, accomplished governess and the best masters procurable in the town of Shrewsbury, which was fifty miles distant from our village. But now we—that is his friends—were all astir with pleasure and pride, in expectation of Charley's return, crowned, as we knew he was, with literary laurels and laden with honours. Yes—all his friends—for, young though I was, my intimacy with his family, particularly Sariann, had so imbued my heart and thoughts with their feelings on the subject that none sympathized more keenly than I did.

According to his wont, Charles wrote repeatedly to his mother while at college; latterly, however, his correspondence had flagged somewhat. This made her rather anxious, but all was again set to rights by the final letter announcing the day of his arrival at Riversdale Rectory. He wrote in exuberantly happy spirits, but would, he said, reserve all accounts of himself until able to deliver them personally.

On the evening of his expected return Sariann and I walked to the cross roads to meet the stage coach by which he was expected, no railway approaching to within forty miles of Riversdale. To our surprise, Charles being remarkably punctual when the tranquillity of his mother was concerned, our hero did not make his appearance. We were greatly disappointed, and the following day went again, but with the same result—and so on, and so on, to the end of the week. The strangest part of the matter as yet was his not writing one line of explanation to his family, who, he well knew, were sure to be so anxiously on the look-out for him—especially his invalid mother.

Every morning, before commencing my

lessons, I, with Miss Pits' and grandmamma's permission, scampered through the park to the Rectory, to ascertain whether any news had yet been received of Charles; but each inquiry was attended only by disappointment and sorrow. Next to grandmamma, and the memory of my parents, I loved Mrs. Beechley, with whom I had spent many happy hours at the Rectory; and it grieved my child's heart inexpressibly to see her pale, patient face growing thinner and paler with every morning's failure. Now, whether it really is that

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks disease hath made,"

and that to her departing spirit was given a prophetic feeling which healthier, stronger constitutions would have resisted, I know not; but so 'it was, from the first day of Charles Beechley's non-appearance, a sad foreboding, amounting almost to conviction, possessed the mother's heart that her son was lost to her in this world. She better understood the nature of his character and disposition than did his father and sister, and no arguments on their parts could do more than simply lighten this weight of apprehension.

“Do not forget, dear mamma,” reasoned Sariann, trying to smile hopefully, “Charley is now quite an Oxford celebrity, and they will all naturally wish to fête, feast, and honour him in every way, before this his final departure. He also, you know, must, in some measure, reciprocate these flattering civilities, and with such a complication of engagements for mind and body we may fairly excuse his delayed return and forgetfulness to write.”

To all this the poor mother only replied, sighing, that much the same thing had occurred to him twice before, but never had her noble-hearted, affectionate boy forgotten his sick mother, and omitted writing to instantly inform her of any unavoidable hindrance to his return.

The end of the week came—still no word of Charles; and Sariann, for the first time in her life, became greatly incensed with her brother for, as she said, allowing ambition and pleasure to so selfishly interfere with his affection and duty to his sick mother. The rector, too, was losing patience at this protracted silence, and wrote, requesting Charles to immediately send his mother a few lines of explana-

tion. No answer was returned, and at the termination of another week Dr. Beechley, now partly sharing his wife's anxiety, resolved to set off for Oxford without further delay, and personally learn the truth of the matter.

On the morning before his departure he received a letter from one of the principals of the college—Dr. Harlow, an old friend of his student days—containing an enclosure that sent a thrill of terror into the father's heart as he looked at it—his own last written epistle to his son returned as it had gone, unopened!

It had lain on the mantel-piece in Charles Beechley's room for the past week, the doctor informed him; but, as the latter neither left nor forwarded his address, he thought it best (recognizing the hand of the writer) to return it. Dr. Harlow went on to say that young Beechley—loved for his generous, amiable qualities, wondered at for his intellectual cleverness, his unrivalled abilities, and regretted by all—had a fortnight before left Oxford on the day fixed for his departure, and nothing more had since been seen or heard of him.

Concealing for the present this apparent con-

firmation of her worst fears from the poor mother, until some more definite information was obtained, Dr. Beechley started at once for Oxford.

Opposed as every supposition of the kind was to all their previous knowledge of his character, the father and daughter were nevertheless firmly convinced that heavy debts of some kind had, in a moment of remorse, driven him to flight and concealment. Knowing his father was not rich, he dreaded (they thought) to bring such distress upon his family, and had adopted this method (oh, mistaken kindness!) of saving them from it.

But upon his arrival in Oxford Dr. Beechley learned that the very reverse was the case. Not only had Charles scrupulously discharged every bill of which he was aware, but had even left a sum of money—no inconsiderable amount, I forget how much—in the hands of Mr. Boyer, his tutor (a grave studious man, between whom and himself a warm friendship existed), to liquidate any after-demands which through forgetfulness might have been overlooked.

Mr. Boyer's unbounded praises of his pupil,

of his scarcely equalled abilities, his honourable, kindly nature, steady studious habits—studious indeed to a fault, sparing himself neither by day nor night—would have been gratifying in the extreme to the father's heart, but for his son's present incomprehensible conduct.

To Mr. Boyer, who knew well Charles Beechley's love for his mother and constant feeling of anxiety on her account, his behaviour was as painfully inexplicable as it was to Dr. Beechley; and keenly sympathizing in the distress of the latter, he assisted him by every means in his power to discover some trace of his lost son. All efforts proved vain, however. His most intimate associates were as profoundly ignorant of the runaway's whereabouts as was his tutor, and the poor rector's grief and perplexity were yet further aggravated by witnessing the astonishment expressed on every side at an act which one and all affirmed was so utterly inconsistent with his character—a character singularly—indeed, in the opinion of many, unnecessarily—free from youthful wildness and pleasure-loving pursuits.

On inquiry at the railway station,—

“Yes,” the ticket clerk said, “he remem-

bered very well Mr. Beechley leaving by train late one evening, a fortnight back. His departure was the more strongly impressed on his recollection because the young gentleman, who was always remarkably kind and free-spoken, was on that night strangely unlike himself—unlike in every way.”

And Jim the porter, who carried his luggage, noticed the difference too.

“In what way?” questioned Mr. Boyer.

“Oh, for one thing, he looked and seemed very ill, I thought,” rejoined the clerk.

“Ay, that he did!” responded Jim the porter, who had been summoned to the conference.

“And then,” resumed the clerk, “his manner was somehow so altered; and yet I can hardly say in what way; but he seemed excited and flurried, and not a bit jokey after his fashion, but restlessly, even angrily, impatient of delay—wanted to be off at once, and was quite snappish and huffy about it, though he knew no one was to blame. Being after dinner, however, and aware that the young college gents had been more than usually gay of late in honour of Mr. Beechley, I paid no heed, but

put it down he had indulged a bit too freely, and no doubt that was it."

"Was he—was he alone?" asked the rector, dreading to hear the answer.

"Yes, quite alone," replied the clerk.

"And what place did he take his ticket for?" rejoined the tutor.

"For London."

"For London?" repeated both gentlemen.

Worn out by the unwonted exertions and excitement of the day, the doctor decided not to continue the pursuit of his son further that night (it was now evening), but to proceed to London by an early train the following morning. He and Mr. Boyer returned, therefore, to the hotel at which the former had put up on his arrival in Oxford, the two gentlemen spending the remainder of the evening together.

In the course of conversation, the tutor observed,—

"I could not but see, Dr. Beechley, that your manner was full of anxiety as you asked the clerk whether your son was *alone*: what did you apprehend? Who did you fear was his companion?"

"I feared that some girl—some woman—was tempting him on to his ruin, ruin of soul and body," replied the rector, sorrowfully; "and—I fear it still."

"I thought so," said Mr. Boyer; "but as far as my experience of Charles Beechley goes—and it extends, you know, through several years—I do not think there exists a young man for whom a father has less cause to fear on that account than for him. I would, without hesitation, stake anything I possess at this moment that he does not entertain a feeling of that absorbing passion you allude to for any living woman. You perhaps remember the old saying, 'Love, like a cough, can never be hid,' and do you imagine, doctor, that during all my long and close intimacy with your son I should not have discovered at some one period or another that far more powerful thoughts and feelings held his heart in bondage than mere love of literary success, had such been the case? No; a misplaced attachment has nothing to do with it."

The poor father was, he said, inexpressibly relieved by this assurance from one whom he so much respected as Mr. Boyer, for of all soul-

destroying evils he regarded such sinful attachments the most so, seeing, as he declared, they inevitably lead to every other wickedness. His perplexity was but the more increased, however.

“Then, if neither love nor debt has had aught to do with his flight, what can have caused it?” exclaimed the bewildered rector.

“Ah, there I am as lost as you are,” rejoined Mr. Boyer. “I honestly assure you I have not the faintest conception of what the reason is. And yet, strange to say, who can be supposed so well acquainted with it as myself?—I, who was so closely united to him in all his pursuits, and who, during the past six months especially, knew how, and where, and with whom every day, I may almost safely say every hour, of his time was spent. But I do not; I am as ignorant as you are,—in fact, so completely in the dark, I cannot see a spot of ground large enough to place one foot of suspicion upon even.”

The next morning Dr. Beechley received a hurried few lines from Sariann. Enclosed was—could he believe his eyes!—yes, a letter from the recreant Charles.

It had arrived, Sariann said, by the evening post, and been immediately forwarded. The contents were these, written in a hasty, scrawling hand, bearing so little resemblance to the clear, bold writing for which Charles was before remarkable that scarcely could the doctor recognize it,—

“MY EVER-BELOVED MOTHER,—A circumstance has occurred, God help me! over which I have no control, obliging me to at once leave my country, my home, and, in one sense, the world altogether. Ere this reaches you, therefore, I shall be far, far away. For how long a period I shall be absent I know not: it may be for months, it may be years, it may be for ever. Meanwhile, try to forget me, and do not dream of following, or striving to learn further particulars. It would be worse than useless; for to no living mortal but myself is my dread secret known; and rather than that—but there, I have said enough.

“Your once happy, now wretched Son,

“CHARLES BEECHLEY.”

Sariann concluded with an agonized request

to her father to instantly come home; her mother was dying. That dreadful letter had been, through a mistake, given to her, and the shock to her brain on reading the appalling contents had caused partial paralysis, from which the doctor said she would never recover.

Dr. Beechley returned to Riversdale, nor again quitted it during the brief remainder of his beloved wife's existence. For one month she lingered in a painless, unconscious state; then her gentle spirit winged its flight to those blessed realms where suffering and sorrow are unknown.

CHAPTER VI.

EXTRACTS FROM SARIANN'S DIARY.

THREE years have passed, three long years, and lo, he whom in our hearts we mourned as dead has returned to his home; yea, the poor lost sheep has returned to the fold, the penitent son has wandered back to his father's house. But, alas! there still envelopes him a cloak of mystery, the which he refuses to throw off; and what the deed that made him flee his country, where he went to, how lived, without friends to aid him, without profession, and with scant possession of money, remain as profound a secret to father and me, and to the world in general, as on the first day of his disappearance. Will the light ever be let in on our darkness? Shall we ever know what it all means?

Most strangely changed he is too. Ah me!

all the light and life of youth seem within these three years to have been utterly quenched in his heart and soul. He has become, as it were, a moody, disappointed, world-sick old man. Poor Charles! and not yet five-and-twenty!

People do say he is improved in looks; but I see it not. I agree with sweet Ennis Densell, the improvement has so much of disagreeable in it that far, far more winsome, to my feelings, was the frank-faced boy of college memory than is the cold, cynical man of to-day. Sometimes a painful sensation possesses me that not my brother, but a stranger, has come to us to falsely claim home and kindred, knowing the true Charles is dead; a stranger, a second claimant, years older than Charles, albeit in many respects singularly like him. But, oh! no; this is a weak delusion. Alas, I could almost wish it were not, so bitterly distressing to dear father and me is the inexplicable alteration in poor Charles.

Days have passed, and—thanks be to our heavenly Father for the same—Charles is becoming more like his old self, more natural,

more contented, and less restless, less like a man who, condemned to death shortly, moves and looks and speaks numbed by the remembrance, ever present, of impending fate, of the chill, sepulchral thought that, albeit he is still in the world, he is no longer of it; its joys, hopes, ambitions, and pleasures have no further claim upon his caring, no share in his interests. Such Charles has been since his return.

He has at last called upon the Denzells, and seen and, as I was certain he would, admires Ennis—wildly admires her. Who can help it that looks upon her exceedingly comely face and figure? I bethink me, is it possible this admiration has wrought the improvement in him I speak of? If so, is that not a proof love had naught to do with his flight and present sorrow?—a sorrow which I can see does not owe its origin to our beloved mother's death, albeit doubtless thereby greatly increased.

Charles has been absent from home a fortnight. He will not now take upon him Holy Orders, but purposeth becoming a lawyer, and is studying for the Bar. Dear father is grieved—much grieved—albeit he beareth his disap-

pointment patiently, as beseemeth his gentle, pious disposition. This morning I, as is often my wont, paid a visit at the Court. I love the Denzells, and I love going there: such a sunny, peaceful calm rests within and around that God-fearing house! How lovely Ennis is! Never have I seen anything so beauteous before. And so sweet and bewitching a manner hath she,—yes, and amiability of mind. Thrown frequently together as she and my poor erring brother are, will they love each other? Alas! I know not how to answer. Ennis is dear to me as a young sister; will he make her happy? I believe (and so does our father) in his declaration of innocence of any crime—crime against the laws of his country; but oh! Charles, Charles, do you consider it no crime against God and your parents, your having acted in the cruelly heartless way you did?—no crime to have shortened the life of our suffering mother, and embittered the remaining years of our father's existence? Oh, it is passing strange! unnatural—bewildering! I am lost—utterly lost, what to think or believe. No; as I think over the matter, I do not wish Ennis to be his wife. A man who under any

circumstances could so care only for himself as to thus wickedly be absent for years, regardless of the sufferings and misery of those who love him, must possess a desperate, headstrong, and fearsomely selfish nature—a nature, a temper, that would be certain to make so frank-hearted, affectionate a maiden as Ennis wretched. But alas! when I remember it is my brother, my only brother, to whom I am objecting—that he has returned, dejected and full of sorrow—and yet, and yet, would I could perceive somewhat of penitence and remorse mingling with this same depression! but I do not—no, I do not, and that to me is most incomprehensible of all. He grieves unmistakably for the sorrow he brought upon us; and he is fond and considerate as of yore, and seemingly anxious to do all that lies in his power to atone for the past; albeit, in expression, words, voice, and manner there is a singularly repellent spirit of defiance and determined impenitence. No, no; beloved and only brother though he is, I ought not and, no, I do not wish him to marry Ennis—that is, of course, in time to come, for as yet she is but a child.

Among other presents from her father, Ennis has received a picture of her deceased mother. It is a full-length portrait, and must have been taken when she was a few years older than the maiden Ennis now is; albeit the likeness between mother and daughter is, even thus early, so strong that in brief while the painting will do duty alike as a representation of both parent and child. This is it:—

A damsel, nineteen or twenty years of age; figure slightly above middle height, of rather massive but most classical proportions; a redundance of glossy, rich, dark-brown hair; neck and shoulders, which are uncovered, as also the arms—the costume being a demi-toilette (as the world calleth such fashion)—are of snowy whiteness and statuesque comeliness of shape. Beauteous features set in a sparkling, down-bending face. Such eyes! Never have I looked upon the like!—brown, thickly fringed with long lashes, and bright depths full of shy thoughts and girlish feelings, which, in the living portrait (to wit, Ennis), come and go as do lights and shades on a sweet April day. Yes; Ennis Denzell is the living image of this same exquisite delineation of her dead mother.

And as was evidently (from her posture in the drawing) the habitually winsome gait of the latter, so doth Ennis in like manner bend forward her graceful head, and thus by nature's art show forth to greater advantage her exceeding loveliness, to wit, her shy, bright smiles and glances, her glorious eyes, and their rich adornment of silken lashes.

Two years, with their heavy freight of joys and woes, have rolled over the world since the poor lost sheep returned. During this space he has studied for the Bar, with so much of his old, indomitable energy and love of learning that, as of yore, he has carried all before him; his success is complete.

Ofttimes through each year hath he come for short visits to the Rectory, and more and more doth he admire and like Ennis Denzell. He says little about her, and what he does say—O strange perversity!—is to censure this thing, or that, which the child does, or is, or says. Albeit I can see—alas that so it is!—his whole being is becoming wrapped up, absorbed, in hers. Alas that it is so! for the

maiden in no degree responds to this sentiment, if perchance she perceives it; the which I know not, for she uttereth no word thereon. But in truth he is not the style of man to win the heart of so tenderly and lovingly reared a damsel as she is. Though greatly altered and improved of late, Charles is still so grave and reserved in manner, and so cynical in conversation, he chills and depresses, if not even frightens, rather than pleaseth her; indeed she seems to me to shun his society when possible, and ofttimes I fear me the poor fellow sees this. Perhaps, however, that is best: if she cannot love him I would not for worlds he were deluded, while in his still troubled state of mind, into raising a bubble castle which the first breath of stern reality might disperse at once.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN OF THE FUGITIVE.

FOR years no news came of Charles Beechley. In this interval my friendship with his sister so greatly increased, it rarely happened but that we met in some fashion every day. Sariann was a handsome girl, rather above middle height; her features were singularly sedate and thoughtful for one so young, but full nevertheless of a sweet kindness and of high and noble principles.

A quaint, old-fashioned style of speaking, too, contracted during her long early residence in Scotland with her grandparents, yet quite free of any Scotch dialect, added much at the time to this gravity of look and demeanour. Charles and Edith soon laughed her out of the

practice, however; but she used it, she told me, when writing her diary, from an affectionate remembrance of those dear old bygone years and persons. Sariann was six years older than I, and dearly loved and valued by her father, to whom in his declining years—prematurely aged by his recent afflictions—she was more than a right hand. She was exceedingly liked and esteemed by my grandmother, who desired nothing more earnestly than to promote, in every possible way, the intimacy between herself and me.

About this time (my governess, Miss Pitt, being absent for a short holiday), Sariann one morning came into the drawing-room, where grandmamma and I sat reading and otherwise occupied. She held a letter in her hand, and her face was very white, and her manner and look full of an agitation the more remarkable in one so usually calm and self-possessed.

“Dear Lady. Denzell!” hurrying forward and speaking with much difficulty, “see here! oh, see here! he is come back! thank God, he is come back!”

She gave grandmamma the letter in her hand, and, breathing heavily, sat down. I went to

her and kissed her pale cheek, and wiped her brow with my kerchief, the while I caressingly unfastened her bonnet and mantle.

“Is the letter to Dr. Beechley or to you?” I murmured.

Sariann’s whole frame quivered as she faltered, “To mother!”

“Oh!” groaned I, involuntarily, “then he knows nothing. Poor Charles!”

“Yes—poor Charles!” she repeated, in accents of sorrowful bitterness.

Grandmamma read the letter twice—it did not seem to contain much in words, whatever it did in meaning—then she silently returned it to Sariann. The latter meeting my eyes, which were no doubt burning with irrepressible curiosity, she instantly gave it to me, and I eagerly read, half aloud,—

“MY EVER DEARLY LOVED MOTHER,—I entreat you to forgive me for my apparently heartless, unfeeling conduct, and the distress it must have caused your sensitive nature. But did you know the truth—which God in mercy grant you never will in this world!—you would not, you could not, blame me. I implore you

all, father, Sariann, to accord me an *unconditional*, entire pardon for the past.

"I am now longing, heart and soul, to come home for awhile; but ere doing so must add another request to the above, which is that no person in the house will ask, or even hint, a question to me, direct or indirect, with intent to penetrate the mystery enshrouding the last three years of my life. If any one of you refuse this latter, I will never again—forgive me, I cannot help myself—never again, enter the doors of my home, endeared though it is to me by every tie that can bind the heart of man to all that is good and best. I know you will send me a speedy answer, mother—beloved mother!—and I await it with feelings I am powerless to express.

"Your loving, still unhappy Son,

"CHARLES BEECHLEY."

"No choice remains to you, my dear, but to grant his—I regret to term it so—his imperious request," grandmamma said, presently. "And without doubt your good father sees it in that light also."

"Ye-es, he does," replied Sariann, hesita-

tingly, a pained, angry expression filling her eyes with tears and contracting her smooth forehead.

“Whatever the sad, hidden cause,” resumed grandmamma, half pleadingly, “it is clear it has made Charles a desperate man; and those who love and pity him must forbear and forgive, if they wish to save him from utter destruction. For myself, therefore (his true friend still), I promise that by no intentional word or look will I wound his feelings; and I believe I can equally answer for my little girl.”

“Oh, yes!” I responded, “that you can.”

“Thank you, dear kind friend that you always are,” murmured Sariann, gratefully. “Every one will not treat him so mercifully; of that he may be sure, and must learn to submit, whether he likes it or not. Yes,” she resumed, after a short silence, and speaking in a mournfully resigned tone, “poor papa takes the same view of the melancholy case that you do; but oh, dear Lady Denzell! you may conceive how keenly, cuttingly painful to his honourable mind is the thought that a child of his—his once so proudly prized son—must henceforth live shrinking ’neath a covering of

secrecy, the close maintaining of which will be regarded by all—ah me!—as a positive proof that some fearful deed, some crime, lies concealed under it.”

“I can quite understand—quite enter into your father’s and your feelings, my dear child,” grandmamma said, gently; “but remember that brief and beautiful story of the returned prodigal.”

“Oh, yes, dear Lady Denzell! I do—indeed I do!” interposed Sariann, earnestly; “and as for poor papa, this morning, directly after receiving the letter, he set off for Dover, his heart full only of pity, forgiveness, and love for his unhappy, erring boy.”

But Charles declares he is *not* in fault,” I objected; “you see that in this letter his sorrow is only because of the distress which he feels his *unavoidable* conduct—so he positively calls it, you know—has brought upon you all, especially his mother. Perhaps, we cannot tell—oh, it is as bewildering a riddle as any which that horrid Sphinx inflicted upon humanity!” I concluded, with perplexed impatience.

“It is,” sighed Sariann, looking as puzzled as I must have done.

“From his boyhood I always found Charles singularly truthful,” grandmamma interposed; “and when he returns I will—on the first favourable opportunity, when we are alone together—ask him one question, only one, and place perfect confidence in his answer. I will put it to his honour as a Christian gentleman to tell me whether it was guilt, wilfully, intentionally committed, that drove him into banishment; or was he, contrary to his wishes, to his better judgment, involved in some iniquitous or trying circumstance—entrapped into it, perhaps, without pre-intention, without desire of his own, and thereby forced to fly from justice? If he assures me the latter was the case, I will henceforward believe in and trust to his honour as implicitly as I did years ago.”

An apprehensive, distressed expression came into Sariann’s pale face.

“And if he confesses that guilt, determined guilt on his own part, obliged him to hide himself?” questioned Sariann in an agitated voice; “for I, too, know Charles to be incapable of falsehood.”

“I do not believe it possible, my dear!”

replied grandmamma, in a tone of confidence that infinitely cheered the poor sister's sinking heart. "Under any circumstances he is not obliged to convict himself; he can, indeed I almost expect he will, take refuge in silence, and refuse to answer in any way; and with that I must be content, you know, having no right to more."

"I have always thought, and do still," exclaimed I, "despite everything Mr. Boyer and others said to the contrary, that Charles was desperately in love with some girl, who jilted him, and made all England so hateful that for that reason he ran away from it. Miss Pitt entertains the same idea, does she not grandmamma? She says she shall never think anything else of him; and so does old Tursey, and ever so many more."

Sariann smiled faintly; but it was a pleased smile nevertheless. Her soul was gladly open to any comfort, however small; and it certainly was consoling to hear there were those who did not and would not believe that "a mystery" must necessarily be a cloak to crime.

"Yes," she answered, thoughtfully, "that has been from the first, I know, a very

generally received opinion: thank God it has been so! there is nothing disgraceful in a thing of that kind. Oh, I trust none may ever see cause to regard the sad affair otherwise!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VISITOR.

A FEW days after we heard that Charles was at the Rectory. He did not seem in a hurry to renew his intimacy at the Court, however, although Sariann proposed his accompanying her to do so, she told us; but he merely returned some indistinct answer, and she forbore to press the matter further.

I was wildly anxious to see my old tormentor, for whom I entertained an affectionate sisterly remembrance, albeit not unmixed with a certain amount of fear of his criticisms and merciless badinage. Grandmamma sent a kind little message by his sister to the effect she hoped absence had not changed his heart towards his friends, or made him forgetful of

them; but for awhile nothing came of that either.

It was late in the autumn about this time, and the weather wet and stormy. One day especially it rained in torrents without intermission from morning till night, and as grandmamma and I sat in our favourite drawing-room I beguiled the tedious hours by sketching a picturesque group of trees on a distant part of the lawn, dear mammy, as I often called her, reading aloud. Suddenly an object emerging from a side walk made its appearance on the scene, whom in that place and that weather I had not expected to see there. It was that of a man rapidly approaching the house by one of the side walks skirting the aforesaid lawn. The large umbrella he carried effectually concealed his face from my view, and that which I did see of his person and movement was so little familiar to me I at once decided he was a stranger.

“He is ignorant of the geography of the country,” thought I, “and, having lost his way, is endeavouring to recover it by a cut through our grounds.” Under this impression I did not interrupt grandmamma’s reading, but

silently watched, expecting he would shortly turn aside towards the high road. He did not, but with undeviating course advanced to the house, and finally ascended the steps, which brought him upon the terrace opposite the oriel window. Then I called grandmamma's attention, and together we endeavoured to ascertain who was our intended visitor, for such we felt sure he was.

Without noticing us in passing, except by so furtive a glance that the glimpse it afforded us of his face was too transient to enlighten our curiosity, he pursued his way round the house to the hall door.

In a brief while Jeffry, looking unutterable amazement, in an unusually grave voice, announced "Mr. Beechley."

My goodness! my goodness! No wonder old Jeffry was petrified with astonishment, and well for Mr. Beechley there was some one else in the room more sensible and self-controlled than myself to greet and welcome him. My goodness! was this tall, gaunt, stooping man, pallid-faced, whiskered, bearded, and moustached, slow and melancholy, was this my merriest of merry friends, Charley?—this the

light-hearted, active, erect, slender student of three years back? Impossible! impossible!

“My dear boy, how glad I am to see you!” exclaimed grandmamma, recovering in an instant from her surprise, and speaking in such genuinely warm, cordial tones while shaking hands with Charles, that immediately a brighter, more assured expression came into his dismal face. “Sit down here, and tell me how your father is; he has not been well lately, and I have felt a good deal anxious about him,” she continued, as Charles and I exchanged greetings. How different to those of bygone days! I diffident, shy, and blushing, altogether school-girlish and awkward enough I felt; he grave and polite, and his disagreeable, large light-grey eyes—they used to be dark grey and handsome, I remembered that well—scrutinized my form and features with a keen look of surprised curiosity that made mine fall. In an abstracted manner, too, he lingeringly retained possession of my hand, until I was obliged to recall him to consciousness by gently, but almost forcibly, withdrawing it from his tight grasp.

What was there in the expression of those

eyes that at the first glance struck me as so peculiar? Was it a silly fancy on my part, and, if not, was it a pleasant or an unpleasant expression? There was certainly a something different in them to formerly—different to that in any other eyes I was acquainted with; and earnestly I tried to define what it was while he and grandmamma conversed together on village and home topics.

How singularly changed he was, to be sure! Handsomer I suppose he would be considered by most people—a matured, manly style of looks. But I did not think so; on the contrary, as I watched him I was disagreeably impressed with the feeling that he had decidedly lost something—a something from his character, I mean, that had, as it were, left a want no personal improvement could supply. These opinions were of course premature, for as yet I had not exchanged a sentence with him; but I am rather addicted to jumping hastily to physiological conclusions. Not a just proceeding, perhaps; but do not you agree with me that first impressions generally prove correct? that if, during the progress to intimacy, you are tempted to adopt a totally different opinion of

your new acquaintance to that with which you commenced, you will after a while discover—that is, in nine cases out of ten—you have got on the wrong path, and will be obliged to return to that upon which you started?

I prosecuted my examination of his stern countenance the more easily because just now he seemed to trouble his head so little about me as to have become oblivious of my presence; and grandmamma, with her usual sweet, composed dignity—albeit I know, by certain intonations of her voice, she was secretly much excited—divided her attention apparently with impartial interest between conversation and knitting.

This had the desired effect of putting Charles quite at his ease, by showing him she was desirous of forgetting, or had really done so, the unexplored gulf which had opened and there lay yawning 'twixt this and their last meeting.

It did not appear to me, however, that Mr. Charley, as regarded that mysterious epoch in his past life, by any means required such encouragement. To do him justice, no sign of guilt shadowed his look. He seemed like a

man whom some direful necessity, too powerful to be resisted, had impelled into acting not sinfully, but contrary, painfully contrary, to his wish and will; and, his conscience being free from blame, he was oblivious or indifferent to the fact that the total ignorance in which he chose to keep his friends naturally laid him open to every species of doubt and suspicion, some, perchance, deeply injurious to his good name.

While thus meditating—my gaze, no doubt, as intent as my thoughts—Charles abruptly turned his head and looked at me. His glance was brief, and what he saw in my countenance to excite such feelings I knew not, but on the instant his pale face blazed into a dark, angry red, and his light eyes gleamed with a fierceness that had positively a vindictive expression in it, and caused my heart to throb wildly.

In bygone years he would have simply laughed on detecting my observation of him, and gaily asked, “Well, Enny, what conclusion have you arrived at?”

On the present occasion he did not speak; I wished he would, for I panted to at once question him as to the reason of such uncalled-

for indignation. The incensed silence he maintained expressed volumes, all the more aggravating because I was quite unable to understand a word of their meaning.

Again he looked quickly at me—he seemed impelled to do so—and perceiving the flushed astonishment in my face, not unmixed, I am sure, with irritation, all trace of displeasure vanished at once from his features, and, smiling with an expression that carried my thoughts and feelings back to former days, said pleasantly,—

“I see, Miss Denzell, you are as much surprised at the alteration time as wrought in my appearance as I am in that of yours. I could almost persuade myself I have been absent for seven instead of only two years—three I mean—yes, three,” correcting himself hastily; then, turning to grandmamma, he changed the subject, saying, “I purpose going to London the end of this week, Lady Denzell,”—he did not call her grandmamma, as formerly; “can I do anything for you in town? Sariann has, no doubt, told you of my change of intention and purpose of devoting my energies to the Bar?”

"Yes," rejoined grandmamma, regretfully, "and I am for many reasons very sorry for it. In the first place we shall see but little of you—"

"No great loss in that," murmured Charles, gloomily.

"—But little of you," resumed grandmamma; "for of course the scene of your labours will be in London, where your time will principally be passed; and, in the next, I should have been truly glad that your poor father, whose strength has failed much of late, could have had that sympathetic support and assistance in his professional duties which none can so well render him as an affectionate and clever son."

I thought to myself, "You are in my opinion—you hard, selfish man—anything but an affectionate son. I can tell you whose fault it principally is that his health is failing—that he has aged so rapidly; it is because of the grief occasioned him by the mental suffering and hastened death of his fondly loved wife—all through you—and his ceaseless anxiety, distress, even shame, during your unexplained, heartless absence." I knew it to be wrong, but, so it was, I felt I liked Charles none the better

for my belief in his innocence of any actual crime. I would much rather he had looked guilty, shame-faced, and humbly, repentantly depressed. My sympathy—my pity, rather—would then have been awakened. I should have felt that a really desperate position in some degree excused the desperate measures he had resorted to in order to escape a retributive punishment, the disgrace of which might have fallen as heavily on his family as on himself.

“Love,” I mentally decided, with feelings of angry disgust, “yes, silly, contemptible love, was undoubtedly the cruel worker-out of the whole woful tragedy. An agony of grief—that, very likely—and maddened pride, of which latter no one could for a moment doubt Charles Beechley’s possession to a most unholy extent, had rendered him blindly indifferent, if not utterly forgetful, of everything and every one but the object of his passion. His apparent self-contentment, therefore, irritated my temper. I longed to give him, in Patterson’s words, ‘a good, large bit of my mind.’ What right had he, who had made others so miserable, to be himself so composed and satisfied? Did no thought of his poor mother haunt him?—no

feeling of remorse at recollection of those bitter waters of affliction with which he had filled her last chalice of life to the brim? But to return.

Charles did not answer grandmamma. He sat with bowed head, his arms resting on his knees, and gazing fixedly on the floor. A gloomy and vexed, but not angry, expression contracted his features. Glancing quickly up and, to my extreme annoyance, again detecting me watching him curiously, his brows knit, but whether the same incensed light burned in his eyes that before startled me I know not, for immediately he turned them down. When a minute or two after he rose to depart, his countenance wore only its first look of moody sadness.

CHAPTER IX.

QUESTION AND ANSWER.

SOME days after the foregoing visit, upon returning in the morning from a walk with my governess, we found Charles Beechley, and grandmamma resting on his arm, strolling together in the garden. Charles looked lighter and happier, I thought, and greeted Miss Pitt and me with somewhat of the cheerfulness of old times. Indeed, during the whole of his stay, which was nearly half an hour, he was so pleasant, so full of an amusing, laughter-exciting humorousness (though he did not once laugh himself, and even his smile was too cynical, too peculiar, to be, in my opinion, agreeable), that I began to entertain far kindlier feelings towards him than at our first interview.

In the evening I asked grandmamma whether

she had questioned Charles according to her declared intention.

“Yes, dear, I did,” she said, then stopped.

“And what answer did he make, mammy?” inquired I, eagerly.

“I spoke as tenderly as though to a son of my own,” she resumed, “but for some seconds he was silent, reddened and paled alternately, and altogether seemed inclined to resent the question and refuse to reply. Evidently a violent struggle was going on in his heart, but, exercising a powerful restraint, he said presently, in low, concentrated tones,—

“‘From no one else but yourself, Lady Denzell, would I submit to be thus questioned. I will answer you, however, briefly, honestly. No; I was neither persuaded, entrapped, nor wildly hurried, either by others or by my own uncontrolled passions, into the committal of any crime, great or small. Nor had debt nor love aught to do with my conduct. So far from exceeding the liberal allowance made me by my father, I prided myself upon living within it, and purposed bringing him back a large overplus. As for love, I was not acquainted with a girl or woman whom I would have

married for any consideration, or for whom I entertained any affection.'

"With increasing vehemence, he added,—

"‘There is nothing in the past I have a shadow of just cause to be afraid of, or ashamed of; and with that declaration my friends must rest content, for they will never, *never*, receive any other from me.’"

"Really, mammy, Charles carries the matter with a very high hand! Do you not think so, dear Miss Pitt?" exclaimed I, half indignant, half amused by the coolly independent manner in which he seemed determined to treat his Riversdale friends and acquaintance. He banished himself from his own country in the most suspicious way possible, then returns, and without vouchsafing any explanation, or even penitent apology, expects to be received as amiably and unquestioningly, and trusted as unhesitatingly—"

"What a repetition of 'ly's' dear!" interrupted Miss Pitt, smiling.

"But is it not so?" I continued earnestly, "just as if he had only committed some such trifling offence against the rules of society as are of every-day occurrence!"

"We cannot fairly say that of him, dear, I think," replied my governess. "His relinquishing the Church—a sacrifice, Lady Denzell tells me, he evidently makes in a sad and most unwilling spirit—and his purposing to live for the future in the great crowded city of London, amidst throngs of people, strangers to himself and all too engrossed in their own pursuits and pleasures to leave them either time or inclination to bestow an unnecessary thought on those of others, proves he does *not* expect it—not in Riversdale, at least—and is therefore choosing a position where he is more likely to secure it."

"And do you think that too, mammy?" questioned I, somewhat mollified.

"Yes, dear—I am sorry to say I do," she replied, in a saddened tone.

"Sorry, grandmamma; why? Perhaps in his heart he prefers the noise and stir and ceaseless amusements of London life to the comparatively dull existence of the country. Might not that be the real reason of his change of profession and place of abode, do you not think?"

"No, dear child, I do not; and if you had seen and heard him this morning when I spoke on the subject you would, I feel sure, be of

quite a different opinion. Upon his again mentioning his intention of going up to town on Saturday, I could not refrain from repeating my regret at his change of plans and consequent desertion of Riversdale to live at such a distance from all those who had known and loved him from childhood. Adding, 'I especially, who almost feel for you as for a son, have always looked forward with so much hopeful pleasure to the time of your settling down amongst us, that the disappointment is more painful to me than you with your young feelings, perhaps, give your old friend credit for.'

"An expression of strong mental distress contracted his features as I spoke, but he remained silent for some seconds with tightly shut mouth, and forehead knotted, as with keen bodily pain; then said in a low, unsteady voice, that much affected me by its mournful earnestness,—

"'And do you think, Lady Denzell, I am indifferent to it all?—that I do not feel? Ah!—do I not! I tell you, I would give this hand,' thrusting it out with trembling vehemence, 'thankfully—joyfully give it to be able to sweep from out my life the last three years!'

to—to— But why do you say these things?’ he exclaimed, breaking off abruptly, and speaking in a tone of such agonized impatience, I was quite startled—‘don’t do so! Don’t allude to these subjects at all! Do not speak either of me or my affairs, if you care to ever see me again in your house!’

“He took off his hat and wiped his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. He scarce seemed conscious of what he did, for presently he made a hasty movement to turn and leave me: we were walking in the grounds at the time.

“Laying my hand on his arm, saying I was tired, I stayed his departure, and, urging him quietly on, said gently,—

“‘My dear boy, do not be angry with your old friend, who is one of the last people in the world to willingly say a word to distress you. Believe me it was quite unintentional my doing so now. I spoke without reflection, though, I must confess, from my heart. Trust me, however, I will not again annoy you, by even one word.’

“His countenance and manner instantly brightened, and soon after you and Miss Pitt,

who is a great favourite of Charley's," and grandmamma smiled sweetly at the former, "made your welcome appearance—as welcome, I am sure, to the poor boy as to me."

How curiously inexplicable it all was! I felt more hopelessly bewildered than ever, and to think now that my theory of the love case was after all, perhaps, wholly incorrect—indeed Charley's assertion made me almost certain it was.

"You know I have always been very sceptical on that point," replied grandmamma, on my alluding to it; "such a belief is utterly at variance with all my previous knowledge of his character."

"And it is very unlikely," interposed Miss Pitt—"impossible, I should say, that anything so simple as a mere youthful love-passion would or could have obtained such omnipotent power over his heart as to still retain possession with an influence so unmitigated that, although of three years' standing, even the most indirect allusion to the subject is utterly unendurable to him."

"Yes; three years since it occurred!" rejoined I. "*It!* What? What was the *it*? I

protest I feel as though I were talking of a ghost! The whole affair is so unsubstantial, so shadowy!"

"It is," replied grandmamma, sighing; "but, whatever it be, one thing is certain in its effects: it has planted a poisoned barb in the poor boy's soul which has darkened and tainted the life-current of his existence, for how long God alone knows."

"I wonder," said I, breaking a rather long silence, "that, although he maintains secrecy towards the whole world besides, he should do so to his kind-hearted sister. I am sure any other brother would have felt it such an inestimable comfort to be able to take so truly trustworthy and sympathetic a friend into his confidence; but, there! Charles is unlike everybody else!" I concluded, impatiently.

"The safety or reputation of others may depend upon his silence and secrecy," interposed my governess, "and he may be restrained by a strong sense of honour from confiding the fearful mystery—for fearful it must be in some way—even to his sister."

"Do you think that is it?" I answered, doubtfully, feeling very unwilling to adopt so

matter-of-fact an opinion. In my girlish folly I greatly preferred, unless the clear truth were revealed, leaving the affair in the hands of imagination to mould after its own wild fashion; the wilder the more attractive.

CHAPTER X.

DIVERS SUBJECTS.

So time passed on, and, two years later, grandmamma and I again sat together in the oriel drawing-room one pleasant summer evening. We were alone, my kind governess, Miss Pitt, having recently left me to return to her aged mother, who had become too infirm to live by herself.

The losing this amiable Christian friend was, for a time, quite an affliction to me, and, indeed, it was little less so to my grandmother; but duty and affection demanded the sacrifice on both sides, and without hesitation it was made. Grandmamma settled an annuity upon her, to be continued in full during her mother's life, after which she was to permanently receive the half.

“This is beautiful weather for our *fête*, is it

not, mammy?" exclaimed I, gazing hopefully, and with an admiration that had never palled, on the picturesque beauties of the sun-lit garden, and through its verdant glades and varied foliage to the sparkling lake in the distance, and the wide-spreading park.

"According to the sky and the weather-glass there seems abundant promise of its being so, dear," she replied, "for both continue rising—a sign as good in the first as the second, I believe."

"Oh, yes; Captain Hilton told me he has sometimes seen the sky during very stormy weather at sea looking as if it was on the point of crushing down upon their heads. Talking of Charley's uncle reminds me that I forgot to tell you, mammy, he is come home again; I met him this afternoon."

"Indeed, dear! What can have brought him back so soon? He was here only a fortnight ago," she replied, in a surprised tone, while a slightly worried expression, which I had noticed of late on mention of Charles Beechley's name, came into her soft face.

"That was just the question I laughingly asked him," replied I; "and the observation I

made, not thinking he would care. But for some reason he was obviously displeased with both, and in his usual cynical, evasive fashion when ruffled, disapprovingly answered my inquiry by another,—

“ ‘Is my coming back disagreeable to you then, Ennis?’ ”

“ ‘Disagreeable? Oh, no!’ I said, disconcerted in my turn, for those half-angry answers of his always annoy and offend me. ‘Why should it be disagreeable? It is nothing to me, you know, one way or the other,’ I added, not very amiably, I am afraid.

“ ‘Yes, I know that very well,’ he said, in a cold, grave tone, and turned away.

“After that I did not venture to make an inquiry I was rather anxious to do, which was, whether he would be here for our *fête*. I hope he will, mammy; he could make himself of invaluable use to me by looking after the boys, regulating their sports, and keeping them out of mischief.”

Grandmamma smiled.

“I should not think that arrangement would be particularly pleasant to Charles. There can be so little sympathy between his grave,

thoughtful nature and the noisy, fun-loving character of a boy."

"Oh, no; of course, he will not like his task," laughed I. "I know he detests boys *now*, but he did not do so formerly. On the contrary, I can remember he particularly liked them and their mischievous, jolly ways, as he expressed it."

"But why assign him so distasteful a duty then, dear?" asked grandmamma.

"For two or three reasons, mammy. In the first place, he will, as the rector's son, possess twice as much influence over them as any one else, and will be able to restrain their quarrels and their wanderings beyond the allotted playground, or from committing any other act of insubordination; and, in the next, that post of occupation will necessarily keep him and me almost entirely apart, an arrangement infinitely more agreeable to me, and, I should say, quite as much so to Charles."

My grandmother smiled, and shook her head incredulously.

"How can it be otherwise, mamma dear? He and I are generally in a state of antagonism on almost every point before we have been

together ten minutes. It is impossible, therefore, he can find my society more congenial than I do his; in truth, between ourselves, *I* prefer *any one* else, and perhaps he returns the compliment."

"Yes," she replied, thoughtfully. "Poor boy, his temper is unhealthily irritable and impatient of contradiction. I see that more and more. He is singularly altered; 'singularly altered!'"

"It is not merely temper, mamma dear. I do not think I should mind that; for I know myself to be a very bad temper, I am sorry to say."

My grandmother smiled lovingly upon me.

"You have a quick temper, my darling, but, thank God, not a *bad* one. It is short and perfectly free of all vice; and your good sense, amiable heart, and pious principles are daily teaching you to subdue it."

I jumped up, and hugged and kissed her after my childish fashion.

"Dear little mammy! whatever pleases you I will fight through thick and thin to make myself!"

The tears welled into my grandmother's soft

eyes, as she folded me in her arms, and returned my embrace.

“As I was saying, mammy,” continued I, returning to my seat, “it is not Charley’s temper only that annoys me, but there is a something, usually, cynical and contemptuous in his tone and manner, and even in his words, when speaking to me, that aggravates my temper and offends my vanity in a way I never feel towards others, say what they might to me; and you know,” I added, laughing a little, “that dear old Tursey does not spare my weaknesses. All things considered, therefore, do you not agree with me that the boy-arrangement will be most desirable for all parties?”

“Well, perhaps so, dear,” laughed my grandmother; “but before deciding finally, and leaving him no choice, had you not better propose the plan to Charles, begging him to accept the post of master of the ceremonies to the village urchins, as a favour to ourselves?”

“Yes; perhaps that would be the correct thing to do,” I answered.

“Where did you meet him, dear?” inquired grandmamma. “I thought you and Sariann

walked this afternoon to Coomb Hill to see poor old Mary Shore?"

"Yes, we did, and it was when on our way there we encountered Charles. He left the coach at the cross-roads, preferring, he said, to walk home through the fields. Sariann and I were of opinion that as he had been travelling since the morning, and just walked a distance of nearly three miles, he ought to be satisfied with his day's performance, and proceed quietly at once to the Rectory. But Charley was of a different opinion, and turned to accompany us to Coomb Hill instead. Now, to confess a truth, mammy, I by no means appreciated this compliment. Sariann and I were very merry, and enjoying our walk immensely; and I felt sure that Charley's presence would be like a cloud coming between us and sunshine, for he was looking both out of spirits and out of temper. I am afraid, therefore, my manner^r betrayed my feeling, though it was far from my intention it should do so. Presently Charles stopped abruptly, and the tone of his voice positively startled me, it was so full (I assure you, grandmamma, I made no mistake), so full of a concentrated fierceness—yes, really *fierce*—

ness!” I repeated, in answer to her look of amazed incredulity; “and he said slowly, ‘I see my society is not agreeable to you, Miss Denzell,—good morning,’ and before I could collect my scattered wits to reply he turned and strode rapidly away. Sariann, too, was some seconds recovering her breath, and then she called eagerly after him, begging him to stop, begging him to come on; he had mistaken Ennis, quite mistaken her. But all in vain; he neither stopped nor vouchsafed an answer, or seemed even to hear her, and was quickly out of sight.

“Oh, how beautiful!” I exclaimed, breaking off suddenly, and jumping up to gaze from the window. “Oh that I had a master’s hand to do justice to those exquisite lights and shades! Look at the sun, mamma dear, enjoying a parting rest on the brow of that hill; was ever anything so splendidly arrayed?—gold, silver, purple, inlaid with gems of the first water! and down upon the lake, the park, trees, and glades and verdant slopes, he is pouring a very river of radiant farewell. If you have no objection, mammy, I will run and bring the sketch I am making from this window”; and,

without waiting for the permission I felt sure of, away I sped, and very quickly the drawing and working materials were before me, and I busily occupied, when the door opened quietly, and Charles, as was often his wont of late, entered unannounced.

His presence disconcerted me, for I hardly knew whether our late little disagreement had left me most angry with him or myself. Generally, under circumstances of a like nature, either as regarded Charles or others, I was afterwards far more disposed to consider myself the principal offender, and felt restless and unhappy until I had confessed my fault and made a penitent apology. Perhaps I was not always just to myself, but what mattered that? I could not fail of being the better in spirit for such self-humiliation; and the best of all checks to my runaway temper were these succeeding fits of remorse.

In the present instance, moved by contradictory sensations of disapproval of both Charles and myself, for I could not help thinking he had shown an unreasonable amount of ill-humour, and even acted with downright rudeness to me and his sister, I secretly resolved

not to make the first advances, and only glanced at him in silence, then continued my painting. His features wore the stern, imperturbable expression which was now habitual to them. It was clear to me Mr. Charley entertained no feeling of disapprobation of his own conduct; but then he apparently never did—no, not even in reference to the mysterious past would he allow the shadow of any blame to attach to himself, Sariann told me.

Judging by his manner he seemed still displeased, for with the exception of one rapid look no further notice did he bestow upon me; but, seating himself beside grandmamma, conversed only with her.

After a while I grew tired of being thus neglected, and, casting indignation aside, said in a rather propitiatory tone, and striving to hide the troublesome tell-tale blush by bending lower over my drawing,—

“Charley, do you purpose making a little stay in Riversdale? I hope so, for I want you to honour our village *fête* this year by your presence. Will you?”

One of those gleams of brightness of the old student days, and which in my memory still

occasionally linked him with that time, lit up his face as I spoke. He did not answer, however, but came to the window, and, leaning his shoulder against the frame, stood gravely contemplating me.

"What a strange, disagreeable man you are!" thought I; "why cannot you speak, I wonder!"

"Well, Charley, you have seen me often and often before; what is there different in my appearance this evening to attract your attention?" said I, impatiently, as the too ready blood again dyed my cheeks; "will you come, or will you not?"

"Oh, yes; I will come with pleasure," he answered, rousing himself, and speaking good-humouredly, "and shall be expected, I suppose, to make myself generally useful on the occasion."

"That you will," rejoined I; "and in all fairness you ought, for not a *fête* have you favoured with your countenance for the last two years, and a heavy debt of public benevolence, charity, self-sacrifice, and so forth, has accumulated against you in consequence."

“Has it? well, if doing my duty unflinchingly this time will help lighten your work of labour and love I shall not grudge the trouble. Can you give me some idea in what capacity I am likely to be called upon to distinguish myself? It is always pleasant to know beforehand whether one’s capabilities will be equal to hitting the desired mark.”

“Oh, your exclusive employment will consist in guarding and guiding all the boys, little and big,” replied I, a wicked feeling of amusement rendering me wholly forgetful at the moment of my grandmother’s advice.

His only answer was a disgusted grimace which made me laugh heartily as I added,—

“I assure you, Charley, in doing all this you will be of invaluable use to me—more so than in any other way. And it will be no light or trifling task. You must keep their juvenile minds and attention constantly occupied and amused; suggest all sorts of games: occasionally take part in them yourself to enhance their interest; suppress any pugnacious spirit that may unexpectedly show itself; and throughout the day maintain a

vigorous restraint upon their mischief-loving propensities."

"Do you really mean what you say?" he asked, in a tone of surprise and doubt.

"Mean it," repeated I, with increasing merri-ment; "why not? It will be only a work of fun after all. Shall you dislike it?"

He was silent for a few seconds, biting his lip and knitting his brows; then, passing over my question, said,—

"Will not this self-immolation separate me entirely from the civilized portion of humanity?"

"Well—ye-s; in a measure, it must, of course. The boys, you know, will be banished to a distant field during the day, while the girls are to play in the orchard where their mothers and the babies will be. In the evening all of both sexes will assemble there for the tea; and then your isolated occupation ends."

Among other remarkable alterations in Charles was the total loss of that which formerly he had possessed in even an exaggerated degree—a quick, good-tempered appreciation of a joke. He seemed unable now to comprehend that such was ever intended, and

in the present instance accepted all I said in perfect faith.

“And what part are you to fill in this tempting programme?” he asked, coldly.

“Oh, Sariani and I shall have no end of matters to attend to—the girls—all the grown-up people—the arrangements and providings of every kind; in short the management of the whole business of the day will devolve upon us—upon our heads, hearts, hands, and feet; so you see, Mr. Charley, we shall be just as unsparing of ourselves as of you—in fact more so.”

He did not answer, but his face clouded darkly as he bent his eyes on the carpet.

“You do not seem to quite relish the task I have assigned you, Charley,” said I, laughing with mischievous glee at his obvious annoyance.

Suddenly he looked up at me, and in an instant all the thoughtless fun in my heart was quenched. What was there in that look? I could not make it out. Did my fancy deceive me? Was there not a malignant expression creeping into his face?—or was such an idea but the impression of a spoilt, petted girl,

accustomed only to the gentlest, most loving management? These were after-thoughts, but now, with eyes which I felt were flashing angrily, I exclaimed impetuously,—

“Why do you look at me in that way, Mr. Beechley? I do not understand you! I do not like it!—you have no right to do so!” My cheeks were in a flame, and I felt strangely roused and frightened.

Scarcely had I ceased speaking when the objectionable expression vanished from his countenance, like darkness before light, and was instantly replaced by his habitual gravity of demeanour, this time, however, mingled with a genuine look of astonishment.

“No right to do what?—to look how? In the name of wonder, child, what *do* you mean?” he asked, anxiously.

I felt ashamed, but still unappeased, and silently, and with manifest disadvantage to my drawing, continued to vigorously apply the pencil. Grandmamma, who knew my “boy-proposal” was partly in joke, and expected that Charles would, of course, view it as such, or, failing that, that I would explain, had listened without interruption, until this ex-

plosion warned her of the necessity of interference.

“Ennis, my dear love! do not allow your quickness of temper to make you forget yourself; you are always very sorry afterwards—remember that, dear”; then, turning to Charles, “She only talked that nonsense to tease you a little, my dear boy; how for one moment could you imagine anything else? or that I would permit such an infliction upon any friend of mine as this mischievous child threatened you with?”

“I am no longer a child, mamma dear,” exclaimed I, still chafing under the influence of that haunting look; “at least, not to any one but you, and will not be treated, and tried to be frightened, as such, by others.”

“Believe me, Enny, the offending you was even more than unintentional on my part: I am sincerely distressed at having done so,” pleaded Charles, in that kindly voice of olden times, the which he knew was all powerful in laying my angry spirit to rest. And this it did now, and so the breeze subsided, leaving beneficial effects, too, upon the atmosphere of Charles Beechley’s temper, clearing away the

mists, and stirring him up to try and efface the unpleasant impression made on my feelings by his conduct, and thus rendering him for the time one of the most agreeable of companions.

CHAPTER XI.

DIVERS MATTERS CONTINUED.

THE entrance of Jeffry with the tea made an acceptable diversion. Grandmamma still adhered to her old habit of preparing it, and seated herself at the table. I for a few minutes longer continued my painting, while Charles, to my secret annoyance, placed himself in a chair close beside me.

Presently, in that quiet, elder-brother style of dictatorial superiority which always had the effect, I am ashamed to say, of chafing my woman's dignity more than anything else, he commenced examining and openly criticizing my far from artistic production.

"Hum! why have you placed those two flower-pots (not remarkably pretty ones either) so near the window?"

“Flower-pots!” with heightened colour;
“what flower-pots?”

“What flower-pots? Here, and here,” indicating the two large antique stone urns topping the terrace steps, and which, I flattered myself, made a particularly effective appearance in my picture.

“Those are urns, not flower-pots,” I objected, my cheeks burning painfully.

“Urns, are they? H’m—I thought them little flower-pots. But whatever they are, why have you stuck them up against the window?”

I now saw the mistake I had made, and could easily have explained that the reason of their intrusive proximity to the house was simply the result of my want of skill in perspective; that I had altogether failed in delineating the correct distance lying between the window and the steps descending from the bridge; but, offended by this derisive treatment of my sketch, I remained silent.

“And that pond just in the garden below,” continued my merciless examiner; “there is none in the original scene, to be sure. But I don’t know that it looks amiss. You have introduced it for the sake of effect, I suppose,

to help lighten that rather heavy mass of foliage? Is that it?"

"Pond!" in a tone of genuine surprise and increased indignation. "There is no pond down there! What is it you allude to?"

"Oh, I am sure I make no mistake," speaking with condescending encouragement, mingled with either real or pretended doubtfulness; "that is clearly water—it can't be anything else, surely? No; it certainly *is* water," touching the spot with one of my pencils, inquiringly.

"That!—that is the lake! Look out of the window, and you will see it distinctly through the trees in the distance."

"The lake! O-h!—to be sure—yes, I see the lake clearly enough, although it is at least a mile distant."

"Charles, my dear, you have of course heard the village news, and no doubt regret it as I do?" interposed grandmamma, perceiving that another storm was just brewing between our barrister friend and myself.

"Yes; I have heard it," he answered, with a sudden return of gloom, and a quick recognition of the subject, proving how close it and his thoughts were to each other.

"I must say," continued grandmamma, sadly, "the prospect of such an invasion of our rural peace and simplicity affords me anything but that satisfaction so many of my friends seem to feel. Judging from all I have been told of the young people, an intimacy between them and my Ennis is the last thing I should desire, and yet one which, unfortunately, under the circumstances, will be, I fear, impossible to avoid."

"Why not?—why need there be any acquaintance even? Ennis is but a child," exclaimed Charles, with a look and tone of almost fierce earnestness that seemed to me to declare that no circumstances, be they what they might, would have power to hinder his preventing anything he chose. "Yes," thought I, "that hard, relentless nature made you act in the unfeeling, remorseless manner you did formerly. I feel sure of it, you unamiable man!"

"I am not a child," murmured I, offended at so disparaging an implication; "I shall be eighteen next April."

"Ennis has more friends already than necessary," persisted Charles, with unwonted earnest-

ness, and ignoring my indignant protest, "many of them truer and better than she can hope to ever make again; and she needs no more."

"I do not expect, I could not even wish to make, truer, better, or kinder friends than I have," replied I; "but I should be sorry, indeed I should despise myself, if I had so unbenevolent, so unsociable a heart that, because it possessed *some* true friends, it was crabbedly resolved to shut its doors against the entrance of any more. So far from that, Mr. Charley," added I, glancing defiantly at him, "I fully intend, I assure you, if dear mammy does not disapprove, to have lots and lots of acquaintance—the more the better—certainly the more the merrier, that all must allow."

Charles stood with bent head, his countenance a very thundercloud of disapproval.

"*Lots and lots* of acquaintance!" repeated grandmamma, smiling, "that is very elegant, my little Enny. What would Miss Pitt say to it?"

I laughed awkwardly.

"Oh, 'lots' is a favourite expression of dear old Tursey's, mammy, and I suppose I caught

it from her. Quantity and number are always designated '*lots*' by Tursey. I dare say I am indebted to the good old body for a few more such little refinements in speech," added I, self-apologetically.

"The Riversdales have four children, have they not, Lady Denzell?" interrupted Charles, gloomily; and, turning to my grandmother, "two sons and two daughters?"

"Three daughters," she replied; "two rather older than Ennis, and a younger girl, a child, a poor little creature, whom report says is an idiot."

"And the two sons—the Marquis of Belford and Lord Riphon," emphasizing their titled names in a keen tone of jealous irony, "do you know anything about them?"

"I am deeply sorry to say," replied grand-mamma, reluctantly, "that all I have heard, and continue hearing, from various authentic sources, of the principles and habits of the young people of either sex, but tends more and more to strengthen my regret that the parents should, upon their return from abroad, have selected poor little Riversdale as their future place of residence. I cannot conceive why

they do so ; they have other as fine, even finer properties than the Castle, both in England and Scotland, and in more thickly populated and therefore more cheerful localities."

"Mamma dear, you need not fear on my account," I interposed, confidently. "Their example, their principles, and practices, opposed in any way to that which I know *you* approve of, will do me no harm ; they will be no example to me."

"God grant it, my darling !" she murmured, in a trembling voice ; "but independently of my own immediate anxieties I dread the evil effects of their foreign habits and sentiments upon the whole neighbourhood, that is upon the young, the poor, and the ignorant."

"My dear Lady Denzell," exclaimed Charles, with irrepressible impatience, disregarding my self-satisfied boast and grandmamma's latter words, "excuse me for saying that, if I were in your place, the permitting an intimacy between artificial, world-loving people as the Riversdales and your—your—not particularly strong-charactered grand-daughter is about the very last thing in the world I would allow. She is too simple and inexperienced at present ;

and, as I said, it is not necessary they should be even acquainted. Certainly nothing more for two or three years to come, at least."

"You are always expressing those unkind, rude opinions of me, Charles!" I cried, reddening angrily, "and you have no right or reason to do so, none whatever. Sariann does not think me weak minded, and her judgment is far superior to yours, because she takes a much more just and rational view of people's actions and their dispositions, and of things in general, than you ever do."

"I did not say you were weak minded, Ennis," he answered, in a half-sorrowful, half-moody tone, glancing at my perturbed visage.

"No, but you implied it, which is the same thing," I retorted, my vanity greatly ruffled. Had he disparaged my personal appearance I should in all probability have laughed at him with lively indifference. Not so contempt of my intellectual qualifications. His want of respect on those points was infinitely galling to my self-love, and seldom failed of setting my inflammable temper in a blaze. It is very likely that, without exactly analyzing my feelings, I felt my mental deficiencies. "But no

matter," I added, with affected indifference. "I am now become so well accustomed to your unfavourable, unflattering opinions of me that I am almost callous to them."

This assertion was just now rather inconsistent. Rising as I spoke, I swept past him to the tea-table with, I flattered myself, a most impressively dignified, defiant air, and was not a little mortified when a furtive glance at his face, as I sat down, showed me an amused smile playing round his cynical mouth, and which increased as our eyes met.

"Two very decided objections exist to the possibility of my adopting your advice, my dear boy," resumed grandmamma, presently, "though much, I acknowledge, I wish to do so. In the first place, the present Duke of Riversdale was one of my beloved husband's oldest and most intimate friends; and although their friendship was not, of course, so warmly kept up of late years, that is, during the duke's residence abroad, a tolerably steady correspondence, with occasional meetings, effectually prevented its dying out, or even growing cold. A short time prior to the death of my husband, the duke wrote, saying it was his intention to

make arrangements for the yearly visiting of himself and family at the Castle, in order to enjoy the pleasure of his old friend's society, as in bygone days. This plan was relinquished upon hearing of my sad bereavement, since which years have passed without their apparently giving Riversdale a further thought. Now, report says, they are returning to settle permanently in England, and to make Riversdale Castle their principal place of residence in preference to their other estates: There is a rumour, too, but at present little beyond a whisper, that some peculiar family affliction is the chief reason of the latter arrangement, some reason that makes them for the present prefer retirement. So much for my first difficulty," continued grandmamma. "My second is perhaps even more insurmountable. Ennis is far too lovely in person, unaffectedly amiable in disposition, and lively in manner, to be overlooked by the younger members of the Castle, were she so even by the elder. You look astonished at praise so openly expressed in my little girl's hearing," and grandmamma smiled as she met Charley's disapproving stare of surprise; "but I have always been of opinion,

and Miss Pitt, a sensible, religious woman, quite agreed with me, that in educating a beautiful and intelligent girl it is in the highest degree injudicious to suppress all knowledge of her possession of a valuable inheritance which ultimately she cannot fail of knowing has come to her in right of her mother, as in Enny's case. An early acquaintance with such advantages, piously and wisely directed, would never, I am convinced, do harm, but decidedly the contrary, and upon the principle that time, as we know, softens down the strongest feelings both of pleasure and pain."

"God grant it!" muttered Charles, a kind of spasm passing through his whole frame.

Grandmamma paused an instant, looking pityingly at him, then resumed, more quickly,—

"And lessens the value of every possession in the eyes and estimation of the possessor. In confirmation of this I know that Ennis attaches as small importance—much less, in fact, to her dowry of beauty than do the majority of girls to their doubtful modicum of mere prettiness."

My cheeks burned under Charles Beechley's disagreeable eyes, which were fixed upon me,

and I bent low over my cup to hide my face.

“When young people fancy and admire each other they are rarely ceremonious in their intercourse, or slow to become acquainted; and the Ladies Riphon will, I feel assured, seek my little girl’s society on every possible occasion. A compliment,” added my grandmother, smiling anxiously at me, “which she is certain to respond to willingly; and it is natural she should do so.”

“Yes; there is no doubt she will do that,” growled Mr. Charley, savagely.

“You must see, therefore, my dear Charles, how impossible it will be to contend with any chance of success against such a combination of opposing circumstances,” continued grand-mamma. “Did no other objection exist but the last named, it would be sufficient of itself to render me powerless to prevent an acquaintance, if not a positive friendship, between the young people and my Ennis.”

Charles did not answer. He was gazing out of the window now, biting his lip after his fashion, and frowning darkly, and with a gloomy, dissatisfied expression that plainly

said *he* did not see the subject in that light at all, and no amount of argument, no number of excuses, would make him do so.

"I am very glad you have no power in the matter, Mr. Charley," said I, gaily; "for I can see by your very forbidding countenance that if you had my case would be hopeless."

"It would," he answered, in a sullen, determined voice that made me laugh heartily.

"Oh, Charles, my dear boy, it is such an irreparable loss to us all your being obliged to live so much in London," resumed my grandmother, thoughtfully. "It would be so great a comfort and support to me and to your father and sister to have always at hand so able a head and arm as yours to look to in everything."

Charles raised his large, peculiar eyes, glowing suddenly, as from some internal light, and looked at his old friend—looked oddly, strangely, I thought. A brief expression, however, for the next instant it was gone, and he again gazed silently out of the window.

"I confess that my regret at present is prompted by a very interested motive," she continued, "for it principally concerns Ennis."

Charles did not look this time, but, to my extreme surprise, I detected a deep dark red suffusing his pale face.

"You could, and of course would, be often at the Castle. If only to oblige me, you would, I am sure, have done so. And what a brother's care you might have taken of Ennis! a care which your long friendship with me and intimate acquaintance with the child since babyhood almost would fully justify. And I know she entertains the highest opinion of your sense and judgment on all points, and—"

"*My* sense and judgment?" interrupted Charles, in accents of such fiery vehemence that grandmamma started, and looked at him in astonishment. "You were never more mistaken, Lady Denzell, believe me. *My* sense! *my* judgment!" he repeated, bitterly. "Why, she regards both as full only of antiquated notions and prejudiced, old-fashioned ideas, less worth attending to than the crude opinions of the merest boy of her acquaintance."

"That is a cut at dear wild Harry Dormer," I thought. His tone and manner grieved me, however, and I stammered apologetically,—

"Oh, Charley, how can you say such

things? They are perfectly wrong. It is you who are mistaken, not mamma. I have the highest opinion of your judgment on all subjects. In truth, I think you 'too clever by half,' as one of my old songs says."

"You have done your tea, dear," interposed grandmamma; "and now is a good time, I know, to secure a little quiet conference with Patterson on the subject of your projected picnic. Suppose you run and consult her as to the possibility of a liberal provision of substantials and dainties on so short notice."

I saw that my grandmother was desirous of a little private conversation with our cross visitor, and away I went, glad to escape from his depressing presence, and quite aware that his disagreeable eyes followed my retreating figure to the door.

"I cannot make him out," I murmured, while pursuing my way across the hall and through the passages to the housekeeper's room. "He is totally unlike other men, and yet it is impossible to define in what consists the difference. He is a riddle, a riddle, a riddle," I sang, dancing into Tursey's presence.

"Dear old Tursey," cried I (Tursey was my

infantine corruption of Patterson), "can you elucidate a mystery for me?"

"A mystery, my pet? What mystery?" questioned the good-natured dame, with whom I had become a prime favourite of late years.

"Tell me why Charles Beechley is so queer—I can think of no more appropriate word to express what I mean—so queer. And what does the queerness really consist in? I want to know that particularly."

Tursey was plump and comfortable-looking, with a broad, good-tempered, red face and small, round black eyes, which opened wide upon me as I now spoke with a perplexed, amused stare. She was alone, examining her accounts; and, as was often my wont, I sat down beside her. Usually I threw in a little arithmetical help, but not now.

"Yes," I continued, lightly, "I mean what I say; and so don't pretend to misunderstand me, Tursey, for I am 'quite sure you are of the same opinion."

"And what is that, darling?"

"What is that!" repeated I, laughing, "why—why just that, lie is so queer, so unlike all other gentlemen of my acquaintance—Captain

Bell, Sir Henry Travers, Major Gascoyne, and—and in fact every one. Now, what makes him so? I want to know that.”

“Because he is a deal cleverer than all put together,” replied Patterson, decisively. “As for queer, I see nothing queer about him, not I: more grave and quiet he is, maybe, than most other gentlemen; but who can wonder at that, for of course he never forgets, and naturally thinks the rest of the world don’t either, his having acted so bad by his family in running away that time, you know.”

“Oh, but that is so long ago now,” I objected; “an event of the past, which people are beginning to forget. Besides, as for that matter, Tursey, I never could see that Mr. Charley’s unfeeling behaviour made him either unhappy or ashamed. Gloomy and bad-tempered he often is, but these moods have evidently no connexion with feelings of remorse or repentance; so far from that, he declared to his sister, he should not hesitate to act again as he had done, were the same necessity to occur. Does that look like penitent sorrow or regret, think you, Tursey?”

“Dear, dear!” she ejaculated, “what could

it have been that he did? Do the like again! my goodness! as if once was not bad enough. Dear, dear!"

I chatted on for some time with the kind old body, telling her all my thoughts and observations of Charles, and finally arranged about the picnic. For years I had been in the habit of confiding every little grievance and perplexity to her sympathetic ear, and which sympathy was always liberally seasoned with scolding, petting, lecturing, and spoiling, from my earliest Riversdale experiences until now. Nor was she sparing of the latter combination at present. My complaints against Charles, for whom the kind soul retained a warm affection, despite his strange conduct, she regarded as mere whimsies not worth attending to.

"He's very quiet like, very, and that's why a gay young thing as you are don't fancy him. But remember, dear, that it's always the deepest water runs the smoothest, and is the most still."

"Yes; and recollect too, you dear old body, it is for that very reason the most treacherous and dangerous. Not that I mean to accuse poor Charley of being either," I added,

quickly: "far from it, I believe him to be in heart thoroughly honourable, good, kind, and fearlessly brave,—Sariann told me he is recklessly so; of all this I feel convinced; but the conviction only renders his conduct and character in other respects the more enigmatical. However, it was not exactly to talk of him I came here," continued I, "but of the victualling arrangements for the picnic." Thereupon I imparted to her my various requirements.

And yes, Tursey could manage to provide us pretty handsomely, she thought; but as this was Friday, and I had fixed for Tuesday, there was no time to be lost about it. Of course the rest of the party would all give a help; but dear, dear! if I would only be a bit more thoughtful, and allow her a proper number of days to do things in! But there! it was no use looking for steadiness and reflection from me, till—"well, run back now, deary, to the drawing-room, for they will be wanting you; and directly these papers are done I'll set to work to think and plan for your gipsying party. I wish, I do," she added, looking at me with fond admiring eyes, as I rose at her bidding to leave the room, "my poor dear

mistress was able to go about with you. Certainly it was a most unlucky thing Miss Pitt's mother being taken ill and wanting her daughter home with her just at this particular time of your young life, darling, most unlucky; but there, things always are so contrary."

"So they are, Tursey," I agreed, greatly amused: "it was extremely ill done of the old lady to choose that very time, of all others to be sick; why could she not have postponed her requirements to a more convenient season, that is, to one more favourable to my interests? It showed such a want of proper Christian consideration in every way, did it not, Tursey?"

Patterson smiled.

"I live in hopes she will soon be back again; but, if not, I trust your grandma will get you another trusty governess to be always with you for the next two or three years at least, and then—"

"Good-bye, dear Tursey, good-bye," cried I, running away; "do not forget my picnic, and plenty of goodies, whatever you make."

The peculiarly distasteful proposition of

another governess was constantly now a matter of contest between us. To my great comfort, grandmamma was also very unwilling to risk the breaking up our sweet, pleasant home ease and peace by the introduction amongst us of a stranger whose temper, principles, and habits she was wholly ignorant of, excepting through the report of others; and their opinion on points essential to the welfare of my interests might differ entirely from her own. For myself, I had so long lived with and loved the amiable, accomplished Miss Pitt that the mere thought of filling her vacated place by another was inexpressibly painful to me; and earnestly I entreated my grandmother to allow me to continue my education under the superintendence of masters and of her refined self. This plan coincided too well with her own wishes to be refused, for the present at least.

Upon my return to the drawing-room, grandmamma was again occupied with her knitting, and Charles sat by the open window listening, or seeming to listen, to the village chimes, as he had done on just such another evening years before.

"Those dear old bells! I love to hear them," I said, coming towards him. "Do you remember, Charley, long, long ago, your sitting there as at present, the day before your last return to Oxford? and do you remember the bells were then ringing and the birds singing on every bush and tree as they are now, and you told me—oh, I recollect your words so well—that I should never hear anything in India half so sweet and cheerful? Do you remember?"

"Did I?" he replied, in a low, constrained voice, glancing hastily at me, while his face, always pale, whitened so unpleasantly that even his very lips became colourless, and his words grated as he added, "My feelings must have been enviably different to what they are now if those dismal chimes brought any notion of cheerfulness with them!"

I had inadvertently jumped on dangerous ground, and immediately stepped back.

"By-the-bye, Charley, I have not told you of my intention of having a picnic, have I? This is such a charming time of the year for out-door amusements, if the weather is only propitious. A good many people are here, too, just at present. Captain Bell is at home on

leave, and I know we may safely count upon him and his two sisters, Dora and Lucy. Then you, when you choose, Master Charley, can be a whole host in yourself." This with a furtive glance and propitiatory smile, to which his dark face responded, against his will, as it were, by one of those rare brightenings pleasant to see. "Altogether we can make up a charming little sociable party, if you will help me. So what say you, Charley?"

"Yes, if you wish it," he rejoined, with perfectly restored good humour. "I have no objection, and shall be happy to do my best to assist in the arrangements. I can't say it is a species of amusement much to my taste; but no matter. I shall no doubt find abundant occupation, if not pleasure, in looking after and taking care of you"; and he smiled grimly, and not a pleasant smile this time, I thought. It might have been fancy, but a faint gleam of maliciousness seemed to mar the expression.

"Oh, folly!" I mentally ejaculated; "I am becoming morbidly weak on this point, and must resolutely conquer the feeling, for it is really like a species of monomania, or will work into it if I go on encouraging myself.

Thereupon I entered warmly into the subject of our gipsy excursion to the Bolton ruins, ten miles distant, and near which, in a beautiful wood, we were to encamp and dine, or lunch, as they might feel disposed. Charles, too, became apparently quite interested on the various matters touching persons to be, or not to be, invited, carriages, provisions, wines, &c., advising, suggesting, and offering, in a spirit of cheerful promptness and clear-sighted skill that was exactly the species of impetus I required to set me off smoothly and yet heartily.

“Sariann and you I can be sure of, then,” said I; “but the rector, will he honour us by his presence, do you think? I should be so glad if he would.”

“No; excepting his good wishes, and any assistance in the carriage or victualling line, I fear you must expect nothing more from my father.”

“Well, we must be content; and, oh, won’t it be delightful!” exclaimed I, oblivious of womanly dignity, and bumping ecstatically on my chair. “Do you not long for the day, Charley?”

Down came the gloom-cloud upon his face, as in a dreary voice he said,—

“I hope it may be, Ennis; but God alone knows what a day, an hour, has perhaps stored up for us of misfortune and sorrow.”

“Oh, if we are all well, and the weather amiable, it is certain to be charming,” I answered, impatiently. “What a wet blanket you are, Charley! Think of Bluebell Wood, and those beautiful picturesque ruins! Why, the fact alone of being there, with plenty of kind, merry friends around one, will contain a wealth of enjoyment for me, and I know it will also for many of the others, if not for all.”

Charles did not answer, but gazed abstractedly on the floor. My joyous tone and words seemed to have at once extinguished every spark of brightness within him; and presently he rose, and, sighing heavily and without further remark, wished grandmamma and me good-bye (avoiding any interchange of looks with me as he did so), and took his departure.

upon the world in the capacity of page or under-footman in a second family, his vacated place in our house being immediately filled by another candidate for domestic honours.

In like manner, two little girls—generally orphans—were submitted to the training of good old Tursey, and the cook, housemaid, or dairymaid, according to the intended style of their education in household duties elsewhere. But to return.

“You understand that, Johnny, of course?” questioned Jeffry.

“Ye-s, please, sir. But—please, sir, I never do get into a boostle. I couldn’t do it no ways—I know I couldn’t.”

“Bless the boy! couldn’t get into a boostle? Why, you are never out of one, in my opinion—never, except when my monishing hand is laid upon you! What in the name of common sense does the boy mean?”

A short pause ensued, during which master and page were of course staring at each other with puzzled, questioning looks, for presently Jeffry exclaimed, in accents of increasing irritation,—

“What is it you do mean, John Tucket?”

Speak out, will you, and don't stand staring at me like a little idiot!"

Thus commanded, Johnny answered with frightened earnestness,—

"I couldn't do it if I tried ever so!—'deed I couldn't, please, sir. A boostle ain't big enough for a chap like me; and then it be only shut up on one side—t' other be all open!"

An explosive burst of suppressed laughter from Thomas followed this explanation.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Jeffry—didn't mean to be rude—but couldn't help it. Oh, it's capital!—fit for *Punch*!" and again Thomas's keen perception of the ludicrous checked his utterance.

"What does it all mean? I should thank you to enlighten me, Mr. Thomas," interposed the now unmistakably offended butler, speaking in marked tones, which plainly warned footman and page he was not to be further trifled with; not that poor little simple Johnny had dreamed of committing such an act of insubordination.

"Don't you see, Mr. Jeffry," replied Thomas, "he thinks as how you mean one of—of—" (another explosive burst of merriment, and a

brief silence, during which the lively Thomas struggled to recover composure, adding rapidly—"one of them things the ladies flare out their dresses with—ha, ha, ha, ha!—it's really the bestest thing I have ever heard! Where did you come across one, Master Tucket?"

"Mother had some on them to wash, please, sir; and to stick 'em out. My, didn't they look queer!—and how they was sticked out!—and wasn't they stiff! I could have sot on 'em well, but I couldn't ha' got into one nohow!" A choking laugh from the facetious footman followed these remarks.

"Mother told me they was called boostles," continued Johnny, "and—and—please, sir, that 's all."

It was too good to keep only for myself, and back I ran, and as well as I could speak for laughing gave grandmamma a repetition, word for word, of the little comedy.

Upon my return to the hall matters were restored to their normal state of peace. Thomas, with assumed expression of great respect, stood listening to Jeffry, who, in big important tone, was again holding forth to Johnny, taking advantage of the opportunity also, I felt sure,

to bestow a few flips upon Thomas, whose éxuberance of youthful and animal spirits often jarred upon the dignified butler's sense of propriety.

“Remember, therefore, Johnny, you can get into a boostle in a variety of ways, and none more easy or more frequent than by encouraging those foolish high spirits that make you disrespectful to your superiors, and which is merely the useless crackling of thorns under a pot.” Such were the concluding words of good old Jeffry's address as I entered the hall.

I had begged to be allowed to take Johnny to the picnic, and, as a great favour on the part of our butler, my request was granted. In using the term, “as a great favour,” I say it advisedly; for I assure you that Johnny himself was not regarded as a more simple child, requiring Mr. Jeffry's experienced advice, reproofs, and directions, than was I; and it is my firm conviction that the dear, self-opinionated old man did not believe I had added one year of wisdom or knowledge to those of age which had succeeded the day he so tenderly bore me in his arms into the hall, upon my arrival from that land of tigers and scorpions.

With the help of a good deal of coaxing and begging, I managed to borrow Johnny for the day. Old Jeffry was never proof against humble entreaty, of which, I am sorry to be obliged to confess, I was always deceitfully lavish in my general dealings with him; in fact, I could effect nothing in any other fashion, since, although granting my requests, he usually regarded them but as the wants and wishes of a child, and worthy of no greater consideration. But, from experience, I knew that a strong, active boy, willingly at everybody's command, was an invaluable adjunct to a gipsy party. I have sometimes been amazed to witness the untiring prodigies of work performed by these merry little bipeds on such occasions. Johnny was therefore, to his intense satisfaction, deposited on the box between Thomas and the coachman.

Passing through the bright, happy-looking village, the cottagers hurrying to their doors to affectionately greet the grand-daughter of their kindest benefactor, I stopped finally at the Rectory.

Charles Beechley and Captain Bell decided to accompany us on horseback, the Denzell car-

riage conveying Sariann, myself, Dora Bell, and a gentleman cousin of the latter—a Mr. Cherrup, a merry, chatty little man—one of those joyous, genial mortals to whom life seems but a perpetual round of sunshine and enjoyment. He and his equally lively little wife, and a midge of a son, nine or ten years old, were, fortunately, just then staying on a visit at the Bells'.

The remainder of our party (which was rather limited), including Mr. Bell (the *paterfamilias*), his second daughter Lucy, the afore-said cousin's little wife and tiny boy, and Monica Dormer, drove in the Bells' old-fashioned, roomy carriage.

The squire, as he was called in Riversdale, his large property lying contiguous to the village, was a fine stalwart specimen of the good old country gentleman, kind-hearted, easy-tempered, and indolent, and ruled by his children—especially his daughters—who did exactly as they liked both with him and themselves, and had done so during the four years since their mother's death.

Fortunately, as Sariann said, his children—two daughters and a son—were of such

amiable, well-disposed natures that the household was none the worse for this juvenile rule ; certainly, as matters seemed, nothing could be better regulated, or flow more smoothly, than did all domestic affairs in and around Oak Cliff ; nor did any *pater-familias* in the country present a more comfortable, flourishing appearance than the worthy squire—too much so, indeed, to judge by a certain obesity enlarging his figure and very considerably impeding his breathing. Dora and Lucy Bell were two rather pretty, tall, slight girls of twenty and eighteen years old ; not ungraceful in form, but too natural and heedless to be as elegant in movement and manner as their brother was desirous they should be. Wifely responsibilities and importance would, the good-natured father declared, quickly soften down such little defects into a matronly dignity that would astonish their friends. “ And meanwhile,” added the old gentleman, “ I like them best as they are.”

Captain Bell, seven or eight years Dora’s senior (other children had come and gone between), was a handsome likeness of his father, allowing, of course, for the slightness

and other differences of youth. He was like, too, in character and temper, and was, in consequence, very popular.

The drive was charming! — such was the general opinion. Charles and George Bell rode one on either side of our carriage, the leisurely pace of grandmamma's fat white horses rendering such knightly gallantry quite easy.

For some distance the two gentlemen kept together next to me, Charles being on the inside; and Captain George strove to maintain a brisk conversation with me across his friend, at the top of his rather loud, hilarious-toned voice. To my infinite relief he at last succumbed to the unsatisfactory difficulties of the case, and conveyed himself, his high spirits, and gallant attentions to Sariann and little Mr. Cherrup.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PICNIC CONTINUED.

PLEASANT, easy movement through sunshine and sweet, fresh air, and with cheerful companionship, was so exhilarating, so decidedly antagonistic to any spirit of gloom, discontent, and ill-humour, that even Charles yielded to their cheering influence, his grave face brightening wonderfully as he opened out into that humorous, agreeable character of which, when he chose, he possessed such unequalled powers.

Frequent were the peals of laughter which his witty sallies on persons and things elicited from the lips of the whole carriage party, especially mine and Dora's (the latter sat opposite me), and ere the conclusion of the drive I felt certain that her heart—long on the point

of surrender—had secretly struck its colours, and laid them unconditionally at Charley's feet.

Poor Dora ! with sincere regret, I know she could not have bestowed them on a more utterly unappreciative conqueror, if even a conscious one, which I much doubted, judging by his at all times composed, indifferent manner in her presence.

It was one o'clock when our two divisions reached their destination, Bluebell Wood, an attractive spot in which we arranged to make our head-quarters. A charming position was quickly found in a locality abounding in gipsy nooks, corners, and shady dells, and here we commenced preparations to bivouac. It was open, yet sufficiently shady to completely screen us from the heat of the mid-day sun, whose golden beams chequered the mossy turf, which here plentifully carpeted the ground. A chatty little stream, prodigal in promises of refreshment and usefulness, frisked and sparkled through a dingle close at hand.

"Oh, this is a perfect place!" said I, glancing at Charley's grave face, which darkened as I spoke. I could not account for it,

but he always seemed to hate my being merry and happy—unless, indeed, he was the originator of my mirth, and then he was obviously gratified. “Come, Johnny,” I added, “let us hunt out some of the good things,” a proposal so delightfully in accordance with the little fellow’s hungry activity that he responded to it with a bound and a “boostling,”—

“Oh, yes, miss! *we*’ll get ’em out in no time!” that would have thrown poor old Jeffry into a fever of apprehension for the safety of the plates, glasses, &c., to say nothing of the compromising of his own dignity in the unmannerly conduct of his page.

And now, all following my example, we set to work with an appetite and a will, and, assisted by the servants, the well-provided banquet was spread, which was to be partaken of previous to our exploration of the ruins and other fatiguing exertions.

Mr. Cherrup seemed to have been expressly created for such like entertainments as the present, throughout the whole day smoothing down all difficulties with untiring efforts and imperturbable good temper, joking and laughing

at everything and with everybody, and, rarest of good qualities, he had not the slightest objection to being laughed at himself. On the contrary, he evidently relished such jokes more keenly than when levelled at the others.

His tiny son, a ludicrous likeness of himself in appearance, was equally so in mind and manners, and scampered about, and joked, jumped, and capered with a monkey-like agility and imitativeness that excited an amount of laughter which considerably retarded proceedings.

As for my page, infected by the noise and stir beyond self-control, he became, colt-fashion, so wild and restive I deemed it necessary to tighten the rein, and thereupon holding up my finger, murmured in grave, admonitory tones,—

“Johnny, Johnny! do not get into a ‘boostle’! As surely as you do, you will get into a mischief! And then—I shall never be able to take you anywhere again!”

Johnny stared at me with round, bewildered eyes, and crimson colour mounting to the roots of his curly brown hair. He sobered down instantly, however, and the threat, pending over

a repetition of his fault, acted as a far better restraint on his young, pleasure-loving nature than fifty lectures from Jeffry might have done.

I was annoyed that Captain Bell persisted in almost exclusively aiding my efforts for the public good, instead of dear Sariann, in whose warm heart (I was better aware of that fact than she dreamed of) he held possession.

"How contradictory the world is!" thought I, impatiently, as he stood beside me, laughingly assisting in the extrication of a pair of roast chickens from their crowded hiding-place in the huge basket.

"There now, Captain George, take those to Sariann Beechley; she is principal manager of the table," I said, as Charles slowly approached, looking moody and discontented; "and Charles or Johnny will help me to find the accompanying ham. Charley, come here and make yourself useful," I added, as the amused captain walked off, tenderly holding the chickens in their white-paper coverings in his extended hands.

"In what way, fair lady?" he asked, a sudden brightness illumining his whole countenance, and filling his voice and manner with

graciousness ; every vestige of ill-humour had vanished like magic.

“ Well ; let me see,” replied I, thoughtfully. “ I wonder whereabouts they have stowed away the tumblers and wine-glasses ? Only fancy, if none have come ! ”

“ Yes, here they are ! ” exclaimed Charles, rummaging in one of the carriages—the latter were left near the picnic ground, the horses being removed to the stables of some neighbouring farm ; “ they are under the seat in a flat, open basket.”

“ Let me help you to carry them,” cried I, running forward, as he dragged out the well-laden basket ; “ we will each hold the handle, and be careful to keep them steady ” ; this latter suggestion upon their all setting up a jingling protest against a severe shake they inadvertently received from Charles.

“ Just first trap that scamp of a tumbler, Enny,” he rejoined, with increasing cheerfulness ; “ look, he is gone off on a lark to the end of the basket, evidently with vicious intent to pitch into the faces of those unlucky wine-glasses.”

I laughed and captured the wickedly dis-

posed tumbler, then vigorously grasped the handle of the basket.

At that instant loud peals of merriment rang out in every direction. Little Mr. Cherrup was performing some more than commonly surprising feats of agility, copied so marvellously by his Tom Thumb of a child that I too was seized with a fit of laughter which greatly imperilled the safety of our brittle freight, several of the glasses taking advantage of the confusion to break from their moorings and run foul of each other.

"Let us stop a minute, Charley," said I, scarcely able to speak, and withdrawing my hand from the basket-handle. "What capital people those Cherrups are for a picnic!" I resumed; "they seem wholly influenced by but one feeling—perhaps I ought to say two—to please and be pleased. Their very name, too, so suggestive of—of—well, of just what they are! Such a funny little, light, merry, cheerful name, suited to perfection to the husband and son and small apple-faced wife. Do not you think so?"

"How that fellow can make such an intolerable buffoon of himself I cannot conceive,"

growled Charles, in so suddenly savage a voice I felt as if he had thrown a pitcher of cold water over my heated person. There is nothing more hateful to me," he continued, in the same tone, "than that senseless noise the idiotic portion of the world call laughter, and are so ready to bestow on every flibbertigibbety creature whose head is brainless, and legs agile enough to let him make a mountebank fool of himself for their stupid amusement, and for his own too for that matter, as in the present instance! Do not you join in their folly, Ennis. I cannot bear to hear or see you!" he added, with augmented vehemence.

"Then do not look at me," I replied, self-willed and half frightened, "for laugh and be merry I must and will; there, sir!"

"Must and will?"

"Must and will!" I repeated, defiantly.

Charles did not again answer.

"I came with the full intention of enjoying myself," I continued, warmly, "and how much chance would be left to me of that, do you think, Mr. Charley, if I perpetually stopped to weigh the merits against the demerits, the folly against the wisdom, of every little passing joke,

every little bit of harmless fun going on around, to ascertain first whether it was worthy the honour of a laugh from my superior self, before compromising my dignity by even an amused smile ? ”

I paused, but Charles remained silent, the basket on the ground, and he standing with depressed head, glancing to and from my flushed face, his own full of annoyance and irritation.

“ I have no wish to be wiser than dear mammy,” I resumed, in a somewhat milder tone, “ and certain I am if she were here her sweet, kind smile would grace everything that was at all funny, and made others happy, if it were not wrong. Why do you not speak, Charles ? ” exclaimed I, in an injured accent, growing impatient of his angry silence. “ You are so hard and cynical ; I declare I think you quite hate to see people enjoy themselves ! ”

“ Do I ? ” he replied, in a low and so peculiar a tone that I started and looked at him, but his face was instantly turned aside.

“ Why, what are you both standing there for ? ” cried a merry voice behind me ; “ is that

basket so very heavy? Let me help; three will certainly be able to effect its removal, I should think," and Monica Dormer, a lovely little brunette of two-and-twenty, Harry Dormer's sister, ran forward and gaily tried to raise the basket. She was little and plump, and graceful and sprightly, black-haired and black-eyed, and in all respects my especial admiration.

"Goodness! what a weight!" she laughingly added, while with reckless disregard of the fragile contents she bumped the load down again—fortunately from no great height, but nevertheless wringing such an outcry from every astonished tumbler and wine-glass, that I too exclaimed sympathetically.

"Upon my word I do not wonder at your both looking so serious over it!" continued Monica, glancing coquettishly at Charles.

He said nothing, nor seemed to be excited into a sensation of amusement by what was passing, then raised the basket, apparently without an effort, and walked away, accompanied by the black eyes, which flashed back at me, brimming over with fun and mischief. Monica was the second daughter of Lord and

Lady Dormer, whose property, Oaklands, lay a few miles distant from Oak Cliff. The eldest, Fanny Dormer, was shortly to be married, and the youngest, a twelve-year old girl, continued of course in the school-room. Harry was the only son.

Quickly recovering from the little heat Charles Beechley's aggravating manner had kindled within me, I joined the rest of the party in making those gipsy arrangements in the novelty and rustic roughness of which consisted half the pleasure of the entertainment. Mr. Cherrup was obviously in the height of his glory; springing in and out of the carriages, diving into their recesses, and into the hampers and baskets, to ferret out the contents; every agreeable, unexpected discovery in the feasting way eliciting a shout of delighted approval, which, added to his unequalled skill in jesting and capering, nearly convulsed with laughter those around him. For myself I must confess I was still childish enough and fresh enough to every simple amusement to expand readily to such sunshine and warmth, and secretly I congratulated myself that Charles was just then not near to cloud my enjoyment by one of those

dark, reproving glances with which he so often checked my liveliness.

"Oh, look, Enny," said Dora, coming close to me, and speaking in a low, distressed voice, "there is poor Mr. Charles Beechley standing alone by that heavy basket, and does not seem to know what to do with it."

"Not know what to do with it!" repeated I, trying to bring my attention to bear on the part indicated, but feeling amidst my mirth very indifferent on the subject; "why, there is but one thing to be done with all the provision department, and that is to convey them here. Charles knows that as well as I do."

There stood the surly barrister in the distance, his load on the ground at his feet, his shoulder leaning against the trunk of a tree, and his gaze, meditative and earnest, fixed on me; yes, on me alone—that was my impression at least.

In one of the large, seldom-used rooms in Riversdale Court there hung a full-length portrait on the wall of a certain dark-looking knight, an ancestor of the Denzells, a young man of austere aspect, whose large inquiring eyes seemed to fix themselves upon me directly

I entered the room, and from whose unpleasant scrutiny I could not escape, retreat to what corner of the apartment I might. Nor did the companionship of others lessen the annoyance by dividing it. No, I was always persuaded he singled *me* out to thus fix his observation upon and spitefully stare out of countenance.

Of course this was an episode in my childhood, and with the nervous superstition of that age I conceived a violent antipathy to the black knight, and shunned the room he inhabited.

Now, of late, Charles singularly reminded me of this bugbear of my childhood, for, look at him when and where I might, his grey eyes appeared to be darkly noting my every act.

“ I wonder if other persons (as in the case of paintings generally) are under the same flattering delusion concerning Charles ! ” thought I. “ He is so peculiar ; yes, let people say what they like to the contrary, he is peculiar ; so perhaps every lady fancies, as I do, he is staring at her in particular. I will make an experiment.”

“ Run, Dora dear, and help him ; has he

not been looking at you to come and do so this long while?"

"Oh, yes! I thought—has he?" stammered Dora, blushing consciously, and brightening at hearing this confirmation of evidently her own belief; "do you think that I really might—that I ought—I mean to go and assist him? especially as he seems to—to expect me to do so?"

"Certainly, dear, why not?" rejoined I, quite relieved to find that another was under the same delusion as myself. "Go at once, you see he expects you; and all must exert themselves to the best of their ability on occasions of this kind, you know, Dora; if they do not, matters will progress very unsatisfactorily to our hungry appetites. There, run away, dear," I urged, "and set that lazy man moving; he hates any but literary trouble, and will be so glad of your help. And courage and patience go with you, my darling," I mischievously soliloquized, "for, judging from the amiable expression of the 'portrait's' face, a very cheering lecture on the follies and failings of humanity is in store for you, which will in all probability sober down your spirits for the remainder of the day."

My wicked anticipation was not gratified, however, for Dora looked bright and happy enough, when, by-and-by, the whole party, flushed by their unwonted exertions, and overflowing with frolic and fun, assembled within the greenwood saloon, and seated themselves—some on carriage-cushions, some on rugs, shawls, &c., and others on natural moss turf seats, around the feast that richly covered a large space in the centre.

Captain Bell again constituted himself my chevalier, and, excepting on account of Sariann, I must confess his devotion was far from disagreeable. Like his good-natured father, the gay-hearted officer was of a frank, genial temper; he was well accustomed also to ladies' society, had practically learned to understand, and consequently be very tolerant of, all their little peculiarities and weaknesses, mental and bodily,—in short, of all those fanciful requirements.

In the present instance, too, his gallantries were the more acceptable because of the barrier they placed 'twixt Charley and myself; for though not really afraid of his censure, or caring much for his opinions, I felt infinitely more at my ease when his cynical eye and ear

were not close beside me, noting my every, perhaps not over-wise, word and act.

I was quite aware (no one intimate with him could be otherwise) that in point of intellect Charles was not only George Bell's superior, but that of all the other men of my acquaintance; and, while this knowledge raised him in my estimation, it had the effect likewise of lowering him in my regard. His intolerable conceit constantly worried and wounded my self-love; for, at no pains to conceal the exalted opinion he entertained of his mental advantages in comparison with those of his gentlemen friends, he was (to an unmanly degree, I thought) equally unsparing to women. Now this want of consideration was the more offensive by reason of the undisguised mingling of contempt it contained towards the female sex in general.

That Charles preferred my society to that of any other girls I plainly saw, but merely imputed the feeling to a dictatorial elder-brother spirit of ruling generated of our long and intimate acquaintance, and against which my girl's heart rebelled indignantly. As for my sentiments towards him, they were at that

time much more strongly tinctured with dislike of the clever barrister than otherwise.

Right merrily and hungrily the great business of feasting went on. Johnny, as I had expected, proved a host in his small self, and forgetting or ignoring the lessons of the great Jeffry, gave full swing to his natural activity (in the present instance most desirable), and ran and jumped and "boostled" about, not only to his own boyish content, but to that of all the parties; such style of unceremonious attendance being infinitely more the thing for "a gipsy party," as Monica said, than his, at first, slow, dignified imitation of the portly butler.

Little Mr. Cherrup, too, a table-napkin thrown on his arm, humorously officiated as waiter, and, good-natured and self-forgetting even on this usually most self-devoted of all occasions, aided in providing for the requirements of every lady, ere giving a thought to his own, and which latter must have been of two-edged keenness after his stirring exertions from first to last.

Never had the sun curiously striven to peep

through the branches upon a livelier party, than that now collected beneath the trees.

Birds and hares, and every wild denizen of the place, fled affrighted at sound of the laughter and talking. The very owls in the ivy-clad towers of the ancient ruins in the distance must have stared their great round eyes to an extent which probably they had never effected before, and might never again.

At this juncture, Mr. Cherrup, to whom, as also to his rosy wife and little son, the company were principally indebted for those feelings of enjoyment which then disposed them, like butterflies, to extract the honey of mirth from even the smallest flowers, in passing round the circle to convey some dainty to Lucy Bell, sprang over Charles, who was sitting slightly below the others on a declination of the ground.

Dora was on his right, and Captain Bell between the first and myself. Roars and shrieks of laughter rewarded this act of agility, for we were, as I said, in that thoughtlessly jocund mood which sees matter for fun in the mere holding up a finger.

It is a curious fact that rarely more than a

step, and that sometimes a very short one, lies between a thing and its opposite—between life and death—between joy and sorrow—between health and sickness—between prosperity and ruin—between calm and storm—between the ludicrous and sublime, or sublime and ludicrous—and so on, and so on, and so on. Fun was at its highest top sparkle; when, quick as a flash, a chord was snapped, and from perfect harmony in every tone we dashed into the direst discord. No sooner had the small athlete alighted on the ground, amid general applause, than Charles, his face ghastly white, his eyes glowing and glaring with an expression of tigerish fierceness, exclaimed in a slow, suppressed tone of rage,—

“I should thank you not to do that again, sir!”

There was nothing particular in the words, which might have been spoken by any bad-tempered person in a moment of irritation; but the look and voice so electrified all present that mirth ceased as instantaneously as though Mr. Cherrup had suddenly vanished from sight. The whole party, some in terror, all in amazement, stared at Charles, who stood clenching

his fists with every appearance of being scarce able to withstand making a deadly assault upon his unintentional, astonished offender.

“Really, sir!—upon my word!—I do not know what has displeased you—I positively do not understand you!” stammered the poor little man, “I don’t, ’pon my honour! I meant no harm whatever! Why should I? Had any gentleman been sitting where you did I should have taken advantage of the position to jump over him in precisely the same fashion; and I am certain—excuse me for saying so, sir—*certain* no other man of this party—of any party, indeed—would have felt thus foolishly angered by so trifling and perfectly inoffensive an act.”

Notwithstanding his diminutive stature and his spirit of buffoonery, there was now a manly dignity in his tone and bearing that at once acted powerfully upon Charles in quelling his fierce temper, and recalling him to his senses. In my opinion he was at that moment infinitely the most contemptible of the two. He saw I thought so, and how exceedingly angry and annoyed I felt at this rude, senseless interruption of our little pleasures; for my cheeks were

burning, to say nothing of the unamiable expression which I felt flashing in my eyes.

He glanced at me as Mr. Cherrup ceased speaking, and, while his look and manner changed rapidly, said in an apologetic voice of mingled shame and vexation, turning to the small *pater*,—

“Pray excuse me, Mr. Cherrup! I really cannot conceive what possessed me at the instant to be so absurdly startled by (as you justly express it) such a trifling act. It was of course the unexpected suddenness of your movement; but under any circumstance it ought merely to have excited my amusement as it did that of others. Believe me when I assure you, sir, I feel as sorry for the hasty way in which I spoke as I am ashamed of myself for my silly, unjustifiably bad temper.”

He held out his hand to Mr. Cherrup, one of those rare conciliatory smiles, peculiarly his own, lighting up his pale face as he did so. The little man instantly grasped it, good-humouredly bowing his acknowledgment of the apology; and, peace being again established, the work of demolition recommenced, but in

some instances with by no means the same zest and appetite as before.

No ; as I said, a chord had been broken, and, although replaced, there was an uncertainty in the partially restored harmony, a flatness in the tones very unlike the previous merry-hearted ring which had seemed a part of the sunshine and brightness above and around, and which had so delightfully seasoned, as it were, every dish we partook of.

Charles saw and keenly regretted this—saw how much less well adapted to the occasion was the gravity now prevailing than the jokes and jollity which in his pride he had chosen to view with unsympathizing contempt, and which the little Cherrups had so skilfully kept flowing. Charles had instantly repented of, and as far as he was able made the *amende honorable* for, his ill-humour; but the flame had been dulled, and this he was powerless, in his then mood, to re-brighten; and though in consequence of his humble apology all forgave the offence, as did Mr. Cherrup, nevertheless an irrepressible stiffness of manner towards him chilled the general atmosphere of sociability.

It surprised me that he watched my conduct with considerably more earnestness than that of any other girl, or indeed of any one present. To judge by his glances and absorbed expression, I alone occupied his thoughts and excited his regrets for what had occurred; and the more persistently I avoided his penitent eyes, and rejected his attentions, the more perturbed he became.

“Mr. Cherrup, you must think me the most contemptibly nervous fool you ever met,” he said, presently, with increased suavity of tone and look, “but the truth is, your leap was effected so rapidly, and so skilfully, it left me far behind in doubt as to what species of—of creature” (Charles was on the eve of saying “animal”) “had passed over my head. I assure you I am quite as disgusted and angry with myself—perhaps more so than any of the present company can be with me; rightly disgusted at that want of courtesy, at that forgetfulness of the consideration due from all here to each other, which my absurd behaviour seemed to imply.”

“Don’t mention it again, my dear Mr. Beechley, pray don’t!” replied the good-

tempered little man, with vexed warmth. "Believe me, that, so far from retaining one offended or angry thought myself, I should be delighted in proof of the sincerity of my friendly feelings to take another flying leap over your head on the next favourable opportunity, if—he-m—if you had no objection."

A general burst of laughter followed this proposal, that did more towards restoring the true tone of harmony than perhaps anything else could have effected.

"Twenty more, if you like," answered Charles, smiling grimly, and evidently desirous at any cost to pride and dignity to remove the depressing effects which his violence had left on the spirits of the party. It was a clever diversion on the part of little Cherrup. "May I jump over his head too, papa?" suggested the boy Cherrup, excited by his *pater's* vivacious proposition.

"Good gracious, no, Tootee! How can you think of such a thing!" exclaimed the mamma. "We shall have you splashing down on the dishes and plates, and breaking your precious neck or legs!"

"If you tumble into *my* plate, I will eat

you up bodily — mind that!” exclaimed Monica, with an ominous shake of her head, and threateningly holding up her knife and fork.

Charles again smiled grimly as he contemplated the small creature whose aspirations were so disproportioned to his size.

“I conclude your birthplace was India, little gentleman?” he questioned, patronizingly, “the name of ‘Tootee’ is of Eastern origin—bestowed by the native servants on the youngest son of their employer, is it not?” turning to Mr. Cherrup.

“Yes, you are quite right,” replied the father. “I hold a civil appointment in India, to which I must return, I regret to say, in seven months’ time: my boy was born in Madras.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE PICNIC CONTINUED.

As the meal approached its close some of the party vacated their places for others, or strolled about. Charles looked restless, and anxious to escape from the company of Dora Bell, who, poor girl, was showing in every little way modesty permitted how even more than agreeable to her were his society and attentions, notwithstanding that the latter were of the most commonplace character. But Dora, after the manner of the majority of young ladies of his acquaintance, was wont to excuse his shortcomings in this respect with the plea that he was a privileged man, and which I have since found is an apology frequently offered by the in some instances wonderfully enduring world for certain persons of either sex remarkable only for an habitually crabbed temper and

flippant rudeness of speech they regard as wit, —not, to do him justice, that Charles ever indulged in the latter.

Presently we all rose, and, Captain George leaving me in answer to a summons from his father, Sariann joined me.

“What could have possessed Charles to act as he did!” she murmured in a distressed voice; “it was so silly, so unlike his usual quiet, gentlemanly conduct!”

She gazed inquiringly and anxiously into my face while speaking.

“He shall certainly have a sharp lecture from me when we go home,” added Sariann, smiling half sadly, “if only for having driven the roses from your cheeks, dearest, which bloomed so brightly there before.”

“Oh, I am so angry with him!” replied I; “if he had merely been a little cross, we might for reasons have excused that; but to put an end to all our fun so ruthlessly! His look, his attitude, his tone of voice, I declare to you, Sariann, I expected nothing less than that he would pounce upon poor little Cherrup and tear him to pieces. Did he not seem to be longing to do so?”

Sariann did not answer, for just then the subject of our talk drew near. He guessed its purport, and his usually harassed-looking features assumed a yet more discomfited expression, and, addressing me in a corresponding tone of melancholy, he said,—

“They are talking of going now to the ruined castle, Enny; will you come?”

His doleful aspect softened my heart at once, and disposed me to act upon a thought that directly suggested itself of taking advantage of so favourable an opportunity to escape Captain Bell’s attentions, which were, I could plainly see, making dear Sariann very unhappy. I instantly consented therefore, and walked away with Charles, affecting not to recollect Sariann.

Chatting carelessly on our road, I hunting in this spot for a bird’s nest, in that for some other natural curiosity, assisted by Charles with the kindly but grave indifference he might have shown to the puerile amusements of a child. So it came about we lost our way in a wood we had to traverse on our road to the ruins.

“Ah! this is delightful at last!” exclaimed Charles, drawing a deep breath of relief, as,

taking off his hat, he pushed back the thick, dark curls from his forehead, to let the cool air fan his heated brow and head.

We stood on the edge of an incline, the position of the ground and surrounding trees drawing thither a soft breeze that came freshly rippling up from the lower ground, kissing the leaflets on its way, and setting them all laughing and whispering. Neither sight nor sound of our friends reached us, nor aught living save the graceful form of a squirrel bounding from one branch to another, or the wild note or flight of some scared bird. We had it all to ourselves, the solitude and the zephyrs, and for a while we enjoyed them to our hearts' content.

"It is as if we had escaped from the tower of Babel into the blessed regions of Elysium; is it not, Enny?" continued Charles.

"Well, I cannot exactly respond to your feelings, Charley," replied I, laughing a little. "You know my life is principally, I may almost say wholly, spent in that species of Elysian solitude, and to-day, I must confess, I rather prefer the noisy variety and merriment of the tower of Babel. It has now, as it had then, you know, its temptations."

Down came the cloud and the gloom, and he turned his head from me.

"Have you any objection to rest here for a few minutes?" he asked presently, in a sulky voice, adding, "that is, if the dulness of the place and society will not be unendurable to you for even a brief space."

"Yes, if you wish it," replied I, secretly annoyed at the unwelcome proposition, and deeming it wisest to ignore his latter ill-tempered remark. "Where shall we sit? Oh, look," I continued, trying to be more amiably cheerful, "here is a charming little bank created expressly for such use," dropping down upon it as I spoke. Charles deliberately seated himself beside me.

A silence succeeded, during which I listened longingly for the approach of some of our party, feeling sure the right track to the ruins was not distant, the wood being of no great size. In truth Charles had become so capricious and unpleasant since the drive, his company was quite disagreeable to me, and I eagerly wished to transfer it to the more appreciative Dora Bell. Suddenly, however, as was not unusual with him, his mood changed, and he became as

delightful as when first we left Riversdale; chatting and jesting so gaily that, beguiled into forgetfulness, I grew imprudently daring.

"He is in such a good humour," thought I, "no opportunity could be better for asking a certain question which only he can answer to my satisfaction. I feel half frightened; but no matter, here goes! Charley!"

"Well?" with a hasty, suspicious glance.

"I am going to ask you something—something that has always haunted my mind, and makes me feel, I am sure, very much as Mrs. Bluebeard must have done when longing to force her way into the forbidden chamber."

The second nervous, apprehensive glance Charles gave me ought to have checked my volubility, but, although my eyes took in the warning expression, my mind did not until after-recollection recalled it.

"I want you to tell me," I resumed, endeavouring to give my question a form as little objectionable as possible, "whether you did not once love some one very much—desperately, even? some girl, very beautiful of course, and charming, and all that, to whom you gave your whole heart and soul, and—and—every

chance of happiness, yes, and the happiness of—" a panic seized me ; I went no further, and merely added, hesitatingly, " and then— and then did she not cruelly, heartlessly deceive and jilt you ? "

To my extreme surprise, instead of showing anger or impatience, or even indifference at my curiosity, an unmistakable look of intense satisfaction accompanied the dark colour that rushed over Charles Beechley's face as I spoke, and the fiery glow in his eyes made me lower mine before their gaze.

" Why do you ask me that girlish question, Enny ? " his voice low and unsteady.

" Do not be angry, Charley," said I; " but the truth is, mere curiosity suggested it— a foolish, womanish curiosity, I allow ; but that was all."

" That was your sole reason ? "

" Yes ; that *was*, and *is*, all," I replied, with a cheerful earnestness that admitted of no doubt, and which I thought must be highly satisfactory to him.

It was not so, however ; and again I was puzzled and distressed by seeing a grey-white hue driving the red from his face, and a cold gleam hardening his before glowing eyes.

“And you think, then, that all my past life has been a wretched sacrifice to a weak, vain woman?—a contemptible, heartless creature, who, thinking better of her folly in loving me, threw me over for a worthier or, at any rate, a richer prize?”

“How dangerous it is to tamper with such a capricious-tempered man!” thought I.

“I am very sorry I offended you, Charley,” I interposed, penitently at first, then continued, pettishly, “though indeed I cannot see why you should be so; there was nothing in what I said to anger you—”

“I did not say I was offended or angry,” he interrupted, in a tone singularly at variance with his previous words.

“I thought,” continued I, with an increased feeling that, in truth, I was the injured party, “I thought as we have known each other intimately for so many years—since I was quite a child, in fact, and you little more than a boy, and being alone together—you would not mind *my* saying things which might displease you coming from any one else. But no matter,” I added, recovering my gaiety; “I was mistaken about the false lady-love, that is

clear, so please forgive and forget my impertinent question," laying my ungloved hand on his, and smiling as I looked up into his pale face.

No sooner did he feel my touch than, starting as if it had scorched him, he sprang to his feet with a fierce rapidity that took away my breath, and half frightened me out of my wits.

"Goodness, Charley! what is the matter?" I panted; "are you ill? are you in pain? What can I do for you?"

He did not answer, but walked forward, and stood with his back to me, visibly breathing quick and hard.

Believing him under the influence of one of his sudden and uncontrolled fits of passion, in consequence of my unlucky question, which had in some way opened the door to a host of painful memories, I at once decided to leave him alone to the soothing effects of that silence and solitude he professed to so much like, and had risen noiselessly to steal away, when he turned and slowly approached me.

The wild, violent expression in his features had totally left them; nevertheless, his look was perplexing and unpleasant as he said, with

an evidently forced calmness, and with no allusion to the rude rebuff my little propitiatory speech and action had just received,—

“Your romantic notion of my heart-broken love affair was perfectly consistent with your age and sex, Enny; only you were quite wrong, that is all,—*quite* wrong. My affections have never blossomed out of Riversdale—and—never will.”

This was all said calmly enough; then suddenly his manner changed.

“Listen, Ennis, I have now gratified your girl’s curiosity, and thereby, I hope, removed your foolish suspicion: let this be the last time you even hint at that dark part of the past in my life. Promise me,” he continued, with fast increasing vehemence, “promise me!” his face was again very white.

“Yes; I promise,” replied I, my eyes filling with nervous tears.

“I do not wish you to be reserved towards me on any other point,” he continued, in a low, softened voice, drawing near: “question me, talk to me, and welcome, on every other subject; but on that one be silent in my presence as the grave! I hate all allusion to

it! It might—might? it will—There! say no more! Come and find our party and the ruins,” and he held out his hand to assist me in descending the rough slope lying before us. The corpse-like coldness of his fingers as they clasped mine struck a chill even through my glove: never shall I forget it! How frightfully strong must have been the feeling that could thus freeze the hot young life-blood in his veins with the thermometer standing at seventy-five in the shade, if not higher just then!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RUINS.

ARRIVED at the old castle we found our friends, the spirit of exploration strong upon them, scattered right and left, clambering dilapidated stairs, plunging into dungeons, examining, surmising, imagining, and wondering over every mysterious nook and corner into which they peeped or tumbled; and which latter was the fate of many of the most reckless.

In one of the grass grown courts we met Sariann and Captain George. The first hastened towards us as we entered, saying, rather anxiously,—

“I am very glad you are come. I was beginning to fear you had lost your way.”

“That was just what we did!” cried I, laughing, with the indifference of manner I felt.

"We lost ourselves in Bluebell Wood, to my shame, who ought to have remembered the geography of the place better. But it did not cause us any distress, did it, Charley? On the contrary, we took advantage of the opportunity to sit down on the top of a little hill and rest, and admire the view."

Charles said nothing, but stood with bent head, and knitted, discontented brow, listening to me, then turned abruptly and left us, passing through a doorless aperture into one of the old towers.

Sariann watched his retreating figure, her eyes full of a sorrowful expression. She perceived that something was more than usually wrong, and seemed hesitating whether or not to follow her brother, but did not, thinking it best, perhaps, to leave him to his own solitary reflections. For my part, I felt infinitely relieved by his absence, and my spirits rose proportionably; nor was I at all distressed by his non-appearance during the remainder of our stay in the castle. What had become of him we could not any of us tell; none of the party met him, or could throw a ray of light on his whereabouts.

This selfishly unceremonious conduct clouded the enjoyment of two people for the time being Sariann, and Dora Bell. Sariann was evidently desirous of questioning me concerning the particulars of my walk with her brother, but my manner deterred her. Vexed and angry with myself for having allowed an idle curiosity to tempt me, even indirectly, into breaking through my resolve, I lacked courage to confess my fault, and, seeing my avoidance of the subject, Sariann also became reticent.

With the exception of this little surface ruffling, all went on smoothly and well; and I bethought me when amidst a flock of chatty, merry friends we explored the time-worn buildings—ascended crumbling stone stairs to the tops of towers, and out on the battlements, at the imminent risk of tumbling down and breaking our necks—I bethought me that, if Charles Beechley's Elysium contained no more cheering society than his own, or pleasanter pastime than grave, sensible conversations, in which no laughter must presume to mingle unsanctioned by wisdom and rigid rules of propriety, I fear I should always certainly prefer the present Tower of Babel style of enjoyment, and that

all the more if only because Charles would for a certainty not be there. Poor Charley! And yet I liked him in a kindly way, and pitied him too.

While these thoughts flitted through my mind we were groping in partial darkness into one of the frightful black holes for which the castle was notorious. How we all talked and laughed, and gaily surmised as to the original purpose for which so hideous a place had been constructed!

I have since read an account. Ah, had we known then the frightful uses to which these dungeons had been devoted, in the good old times, our hair would have stood on end, and our thoughtless merriment have felt as horribly out of place as spritely dance music over a huge tomb full of skulls and bones of murdered men.

I was still obliged to manœuvre, with no small amount of skill to escape being the object of Captain Bell's attentions, which were only unpleasant to me, as I said, on account of the distress they caused poor Sariann. In the shadowy region where we were wandering about this was easy enough, and rather amusing to

me. We all looked more like spirits of the departed than living human beings, while gliding to and fro among the gloomy recesses; and to effect my purpose I became so exceedingly erratic the gallant captain was never certain where to find me. Sometimes imagining I was quite near, having only an instant before indistinctly seen me standing close beside him, and addressed some question or remark in a tender, subdued tone, great was his astonishment upon receiving an answer from the gratified Sariann Beechley, in whose near vicinity I had thus decoyed and left him.

By degrees the truth forced itself on his unwilling mind, that for some reason (perhaps my heart was already engaged) his devotion was not agreeable to me; and, after the manner of men on such occasions, he immediately became hurt and offended with me.

My end was gained, however, and his flattering notice no longer bestowed where it was so obviously undesired.

Possibly this humbled state of feeling made him grateful to the handsome Miss Beechley for the unmistakable pleasure she took in his society, and thereupon he transferred his atten-

tions to herself and merry little Monica Dormer.

"Ennis," murmured Dora Bell, gliding to my side in the gloom, and speaking in hesitating words, "do you know where—I mean, do you know why—why Charles Beechley has not come with us into these ruins? Is he gone back, do you think?"

"No; I cannot tell why he has not," replied I, looking round and about: "perhaps he is; it is impossible to be certain of anybody's presence, or non-presence, in such a place as this, stretching away as it does right and left. What makes you think he is not?"

"Oh, I am sure he is not, or I should have seen him," she answered, with that unconscious heart-earnestness which love's eyes alone could have made so certain.

"Those are just the sort of kill-joy places for such a laughter-hating being as Charles to be sulking about in," I suggested, indicating a black, horrible-looking passage, out of which I should not have felt surprised to see a monster gnome issuing.

"Oh, Ennis! and he is so funny and humorous when he chooses, and convulses his

friends with laughter, "as he did this morning!" pleaded Dora. "Now, does that agree with the hatred of laughter you accuse him of?"

"Yes, exactly; there it is: when *he* chooses to exert himself to please and be pleased, you may acknowledge your appreciation of *his* humour by laughing as much as you like, but not other people's. And how often does he condescend to be so gracious? About twice in the year, I should say; and if circumstances are unfavourable, not so often as that even."

"You do not seem to like Charles much?" replied Dora, a tone of satisfaction ringing in her voice.

"Simply, dear, because I do not see 'much' to like in him," I rejoined, laughing indifferently. "But oh, let us get out of this frightful place! Fancy being immured here for months, perhaps years! Good gracious! four-and-twenty hours would send me off my head for ever."

"The mere knowledge I was going to be shut up here would of itself extinguish every ray of sense I possess!" answered Dora, hurrying after me to the foot of the slimy steps we had descended.

"What are you two young conspirators plotting about in these doleful regions?" inquired Mr. Cherrup, suddenly appearing beside us, as though just risen through the ground.

"We were talking of Mr. Beechley, and wondering what had become of him," replied I. "Have you any idea, Mr. Cherrup?"

"The last I saw of him he was leaning against a broken buttress of the wall, in picturesque attitude, smoking a cigar; and upon my asking him to accompany me down into the dungeons he shuddered as if an east wind had cut him through the body; and, 'pon my word, I don't think I was mistaken, but he seemed to me to turn as white as if I had told him seriously he was going to be incarcerated in one of them for the remainder of his life. The next minute away he went, muttering something about returning to the sunshine and the wood. He is a queer fellow! a *very* queer fellow!"

The stentorian voice of Mr. Bell hailing the subterraneous explorers through one of the narrow loopholes above, desiring them to come out and return to the wood, soon brought us all round him.

Directly I saw Sariann I ran to comfort her with the intelligence of her brother's whereabouts, according to the little athlete's account. Her anxious face lightened at my words, as if a heavy load had been removed from her heart, surprising me by the apparently uncalled for seriousness of her feelings.

On arriving at head-quarters in Bluebell Wood, there, reclining at his ease on the soft grass, smoking a cigar, and looking supinely indifferent to all sublunary things, was the uncourteous deserter, Mr. Charles Beechley.

But—delightful sight to tired, thirsty pleasure-seekers!—on the spot of our recent bivouac stood a long, large table, procured from some neighbouring cottage, and bearing thereon the necessary apparatus for tea. To Charley, the suggester and director of this agreeable surprise, we warmly expressed our thanks, but he gruffly answered,—

“Johnny is far more deserving of your gratitude than I am.”

“Johnny!” I said. “Why, was he its suggester?”

“Not exactly that; but he did more towards carrying out the idea than the three others

effected together. 'Tea?' he repeated, in answer to my proposition, staring his round eyes; 'yes, *surely*! Why, it were just the thing the young missus' (by which comprehensive term he, of course, meant you, Ennis) 'would be roight glad of! He knew she would, for he had heered her say as how she was desperate fond of tea, she was; and thought it betterer than all t' other meals in the day.'"

Every one laughed heartily at this sally, for Charles delivered it with wondrously skilful powers of mimicry, his voice, his very expression of face, being a perfect imitation of Johnny's.

My cheeks burned at this betrayal of, as I thought it, my girlish weakness, inwardly resolving that, for the future, I would be more reticent in the expression of my opinions before such a sharp registrar of them as Master Johnny.

"After that little domestic disclosure," continued Charles, glancing with an amused smile at my discomfited countenance, "Johnny, ignoring the opposition of the other fellows, who, disliking the prospect of the additional exertion tea-procuring involved for them, pro-

tested no house lay within attainable distance for the obtaining necessities, sprang away like a squirrel, declaring, 'I'll be bound I'll find summut will do.' He succeeded, and that is the result!" concluded Charles, with a movement of his hand in the direction of the table.

"Charles, what is our rector's opinion touching the threatened inroad upon that rustic tranquillity Riversdale has so long enjoyed?" inquired Mr. Bell, as we all sat round the table, sipping and drinking tea, and eating delicious brown bread and butter with a heartiness that seemed to deny the possibility of a morsel having been partaken of since breakfast.

"It appears to me there can be but one opinion on the subject entertained by all right-thinking people," replied Charles, his face clouding. "The day that witnesses their arrival in the neighbourhood will prove the saddest Riversdale has ever opened its eyes upon."

"And that is your father's opinion?" rejoined Mr. Bell. "Well, I am sorry to hear it; I was in hopes his clearer judgment might have discovered a brighter side to the cloud than my duller intellect can."

"It would be a very deluded intellect indeed that imagined it saw one," answered Charles, gloomily.

"What must be mine then?" interposed Monica, her face sparkling, "for to my mental vision there is no *dark* side. Are you not of my opinion, Ennis? I know *you* are, Lucy."

"What are you alluding to?" I questioned, eagerly. "Is it really true the beautiful, stately old building is at last to be rescued from the spell under which it has so long lain sleeping? Is that it?"

"Yes, dear, from what I heard this morning I am afraid it is true; nevertheless so many reports of the kind have been in circulation during the last two years that I do not now place much faith in them."

She glanced at Charles as she spoke. He said no more, but sat with bent head, frowning ferociously into his cup, and unconsciously stirring the contents with impetuous haste.

"This time, however, you may do so, Sariann," said Captain George, "for I know it to be a true announcement, having yesterday received the news from the duke's steward.

Commands had, he said, been sent to the castle, desiring that the whole place, from top to bottom and from end to end, was to be put into first-rate order for the duke and family."

"Oh, how charming!" cried I; "how glad I am!"

"And so am I!" "and I!" "and I!" responded Lucy, and Monica, and, to the general amusement, Master Tootee Cherrup also.

'*You?* you puppy dog's tail!" laughed the squire, "why, what concern will it be of yours?"

"Oh," replied the small thing, throwing back his head with pompous gravity, and at once entering into the spirit of Monica's and my wishes and feelings (he seemed a marvelously keen-sighted mannikin). "I delight in dinners, balls, and garden fêtes; but particularly the dinners and suppers, when there is plenty of good wine; but it *must* be good, and of a fine fruity flavour—*that* is the style of vintage to my taste."

The burst of laughter and applause which followed this answer was almost deafening.

Greatly enhanced was the piquancy of Tootee's jokes, both practical and verbal, by the singularity of his appearance.. We girls

mutually agreed that of all the ugliest specimens of childhood we had never seen one to compare with this boy. And his personal unattractiveness was not lessened by the grown-up expression of cleverness, half animal, half human, keenly depicted in his small, impish features,—especially the narrow, beady black eyes. His figure, too, was equally remarkable. Thin to emaciation, his supple legs and arms looked like four sticks; and as, with all a young boy's independence of the world's opinion, he evidently delighted in exaggerating his uncommon ugliness by the most frightful contortions of limb and body, his peculiarities of every kind were, as can well be imagined, unmercifully brought to light. When passing close under the observation of a young lady, his walk, or rather progress, was a series of doublings, backwards and forwards, and bendings right and left, wonderful to behold, being performed with all the skilled flexibility of a professed harlequin.

These reckless personal disfigurements of a form which in its moulding seemed already to have been the sport of nature, though gratifying to a childish vanity as graceless as his

movements, were evidently matter of exceeding mortification to the poor little mother, who could not bear to see her darling make such a Flibbertygibberty of himself.

“Tootee! Tootee!” we heard her continually pleading in an under-tone, and strongly emphasized words, “don’t make such a *monkey* of yourself!”

“As if Dame Nature had not done that for him already!” whispered Monica.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PICNIC CONCLUDED.

TEA concluded, good Mr. Bell, whose naturally hearty appetite had been delightfully sharpened by the change, the exercise, the fresh air, &c., and had indulged liberally at dinner, and now again at tea, and was in consequence more than usually short-breathed and gasping, proposed winding up the day's recreations by a little music. An enthusiast in the latter, he first entertained his friends by a couple of ballads, to which he accompanied himself on the guitar. *Entertained!* I am ashamed to confess he did, in the most literal sense of the word. The introductory song being of a comic character justified our laughing to our hearts' content—indeed it was fully expected we should do so—but unfortunately the second was in a

totally different style, or, rather, intended to be. It was an old well-known plaintive ditty, 'The Cuckoo Song,' and which, under the squire's rendering, assumed so burlesque a character that all, excepting his daughters, were impressed with the conviction that, like its successful predecessor, its mission was simply to excite mirth. We were still in a very laughter-loving mood, and when at the termination of each verse our worthy performer, in sober seriousness, panted and gasped out "*Cuc-koo! Cuc-koo!*" the merriment became so great—Monica even clapping her hands, and Tootee squealing out "*Bravo! bravo!*"—that the discomfited squire, perceiving how fruitless were his utmost efforts to awaken a feeling of sympathy for his pathetic melody, was fain to cease singing, and, with a rueful smile, affecting to be gratified by our approving but mistaken mirth, laid down his guitar.

"Thank you, Squire! thank you!" cried Mr. Cherrup, as soon as he recovered breath to speak: "that was capital! capital! You are first rate at jolly songs,—'pon my honour you are! You would make a fortune in no time if you gave your talents to the public—you would,

'pon my honour!" and the little man wiped his heated forehead vehemently. "That cuckoo was perfect," he added in an aggravating tone of patronizing encouragement, "quite perfect!" and again he laughed delightedly.

The easy-tempered Squire smiled, saying lugubriously,—

"He was glad they were pleased—after all to amuse and be amused was the great end to be attained at parties of this kind, no matter by what means effected."

Other songs followed, but everything sounded tame after the signal success of the 'Cuckoo,' as poor Mr. Bell was complimentarily assured on all sides; being further flattered also by that "provoking imp," as Monica called him, Tootee Cherrup, who, with wonderfully correct imitation, kept up a continual "Cucko-o!" until our return home.

The morning's drive, with its bright fresh gladness and glitter, had exhilarated the spirits; but on our return the sweet soothing influences of the quiet sunset were, we all agreed, more really charming to the feelings.

The arrangement of our party was the same

as before. Charles rode beside Dora and me, this time, however, moody and silent, glancing doubtfully at me when I spoke to him, as though apprehensive I was intending to again endeavour surreptitiously to make my way into his Bluebeard's closet.

He need not have feared, after my recent experience. Not for worlds would I, within his sight and hearing, have attempted to even peep through the keyhole.

When the glare of the day has subsided, beautiful scenery, such as then stretched away on our right, left, and front, always exercises a pleasantly saddening influence on my spirits; and I sighed as I looked around, and expressed my wonder how any person, free to make their own choice, could prefer living in a town instead of the country.

"Fancy this exquisite evening spent amidst close hot streets and thickly populated houses! Think of that, and look at those soft picturesque lights and shades creeping over and into the woods and valleys, the numerous sweet rural sounds; and this balmy air," added I, sniffing it rapturously, "laden with the scent of flowers from mountain, vale, and meadow! By

the way, that thin veil of purple mist stealing across the distant country promises another fine day to-morrow. I much prefer a view mystified by a delicate haze like this; do not you, Charley?"

"Yes, much," he replied in a low, melancholy voice; "everything mellowed down—softened, subdued, harmonizes far more with my, I am afraid, unsociable nature than unshadowed brightness ever does."

At that time I could willingly have qualified this answer by substituting *some* things for *everything*, convinced that in doing so I was expressing the feelings of others as well as my own. Not so now: a more enlarged knowledge of human nature has taught me that Charles, in speaking that apparently gloomy sentiment, but uttered the heart-felt opinion of more than half mankind.

"Do you not think your words carry a very ascetic sound with them, Mr. Beechley?" questioned Mr. Cherrup (we were just then slowly ascending a hill), "though I will confess," he added, quickly, "you might not any of you think so of such a seemingly light-hearted fellow as I am; but there are occasions,

'pon my honour there are, when my spirit could, aye, and would, willingly endorse that sentiment of yours, Mr. Charles."

"I beg to put my signature to it now—at once," interposed George Bell. "The shady softened hours of a sunset evening like this is infinitely more to my taste than was the untempered brightness of midday; and, in so speaking, I metaphorically include everything, as does my friend Beechley."

"I spoke literally, not metaphorically!" observed Charles.

"'Everything,' is a very inclusive term, and I declare I hardly understand its application," said I, wondering at their gloomy opinions after so glorious a day.

"For one thing, I refer to people, Miss Denzell," replied Captain Bell, coldly, and with, I felt sure, a secret feeling of satisfaction at the opportunity thus afforded of perhaps punishing me for my recent unflattering behaviour to himself; "women especially—that strongest point with men. Of all the female characters (I can affirm this from plentiful experience) the most attractive to ninety-nine out of a hundred of my sex is that

possessing a combination of those essentially feminine charms, a gentle, subdued cheerfulness, kindly considerateness of manner towards every one, good sense in conjunction with humility, and an habitually sweet thoughtfulness for the happiness and welfare of others. Add to all this a sensitive humanity for every living thing in distress, and you have a perfect woman."

I pressed my arm against Sariann to call her attention to the fact of how this description suited herself; but she was too humble to see it.

In saying the return-home arrangements were the same as in the morning, I was wrong on one point. Monica insisted upon coming back with me, and begged Dora Bell to change seats in the carriages—a request which, to my satisfaction, she acceded to. There was no girl whose society was so amusingly agreeable to me as pretty Monica's. I was afraid poor Dora did not, in her heart, relish the move; but her black-eyed petitioner was unconscious of that fact, and so it was done.

"My goodness!" cried the lively damsel, "what a stupid piece of feminine perfection!

A Lucilla Stanley! And it does not matter, I suppose, how ugly your charming woman is; for you make no mention of looks, most gallant captain?"

"No; for the good qualities I have named would create beauty of themselves, Miss Monica."

"Oh, would they?" she replied, laughing. "I should like to see what stand made beauty of that kind would effect in opposition to Nature's beauty."

Captain Bell reddened, fortunately unseen by wicked little Monica.

"The fact is, Miss Dormer," he resumed, in a rather confused voice, "no girl of ordinary or disagreeable features could possess them; such fascinations of character could only emanate from a corresponding winsomeness of form. In saying this, however, bear in mind, young lady, that many a girl, whose personal appearance you might condemn as absolutely plain, we men might, nay, more often than not, do, consider attractive and lovable."

"That's true," rejoined Monica, gaily, "and proves how deficient in good taste you men are."

"Men are much more influenced by expression than by mere beauty of form and feature," observed Charles. "I doubt if one man in fifty would prefer marrying the woman he admires most in preference to her he likes best."

"But why not try and unite the two?" I asked, smiling.

"Yes, the thing is possible, and is occasionally done, but very rarely." He spoke slowly, in that altered, constrained voice which always perplexed and often annoyed me, glancing quickly at me as he spoke. "Yes," he went on; "they are sometimes united. When they are, Heaven help the unfortunate wretch who loves the fair possessor hopelessly!"

"How widely we have wandered from our first subject!" interposed Sariann. "What was it about? I almost forget."

"There's such a charm in melancholy,
I would not, if I could, be gay,"

sang Monica. "That was the introductory subject, Sariann; and it seems to me they have kept, more or less, close to it."

"No; we have not strayed so far from the

point as you might think, Miss Beechley," rejoined Mr. Cherrup, laughing.

"I conclude, then, it is upon the strength of this exhilarating principle, that melancholy rules the hearts of men, so many gentlemen marry invalids?" resumed Monica.

"Capital! capital!" cried the little *pater*. "I declare you have us there, Miss Dormer. Yes, 'pon my honour, that is a fact. Really, now, when I think of it, I can't remember an invalid girl in any family who was not married first (if old enough), or might have been, if she chose. Yes; and stranger still, I have known, at different times, three nice pretty maidens who all died of consumption, and each was followed to her grave by poor young lovers to whom they had actually been engaged to be married."

"That singular taste on the part of the gentlemen no doubt accounts for the matrimonial engagements so often formed, we are told, in hydropathic establishments."

"That taste is, I think, easily accounted for," resumed Captain Bell. "Invalidism naturally exercises a softening, subduing, if not a refining, influence over both mind and

manners. Generally speaking, too (if the patient be young, that is), delicacy of health is more or less beautifying in its effects upon the person of the fair sufferer. Even in the case of men, I have seen fellows who were quite handsome when ill become positively plain with restored health."

"Well, I must say the invalid portion of the fascinating woman's possessions would have no attraction for me," laughed little Cherrup. "I do not myself admire ill health under any of its phases; nor do I believe a husband could be found who does, no matter how absurdly romantic might have been his notions on the subject as a lover. What kind of wife and mother can a poor young woman make, three parts of whose time is of necessity spent lying in bed or on a sofa, and an equally undue portion of the domestic purse expended on doctors, dainties, and chemists?"

Again there was a merry laugh at this dismal picture of matrimonial discomfort. Even Charles smiled gravely.

"Here are a set of directions for you two bachelors for your choice of wives, written by Lytton Bulwer, a very worldly wise man, as

you know," replied Monica, flashing a bright glance at the officer and barrister,—

“ ‘ Though I want the divine,
I will stoop to the human ;
I will briefly define
What I ask in a woman.
She must always be seen
As I first did behold her ;
She is now at eighteen,
And must cease to grow older.
She must dress to a pin,
Have new robes in profusion ;
But no bills must come in,
To destroy the illusion.
She must nurse me when ill,
So *her* health must be splendid :
Could she stoop to a pill,
All romance would be ended.’ ”

There is more of it," added Monica; "but I think that is enough for any reasonable man."

"Excellent! capital! I have not heard those verses before," cried Mr. Cherrup. "You must write them out for me, Miss Monica; will you not?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," replied the lively girl, with about as much intention, I saw in her face, of fulfilling her promise as of manufacturing a kite for Tootee.

"In sober seriousness, though," continued Mr. Cherrup, "I do not think it a fair thing—in fact, hardly an honourable—for any one in a confirmed state of bad health to marry; they are almost certain to entail upon themselves and those belonging to them such an after-life of misery by so doing. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Beechley?"

"Why do you particularly refer to me, sir?" exclaimed Charles, angrily, and with an unpleasant gleam in his light-grey eyes.

The poor little man stared, saying, apologetically,—

"Well, sir, to confess the truth, I was impressed with the idea you were so thoroughly strong and free from any bodily infirmity, that you would be certain to sympathize with my opinions. If I am mistaken, I beg your pardon for having unintentionally hurt your feelings by what I said."

Charles bowed, and had the grace to redden, but remained silent.

"I must say you are in a very disagreeable, quarrelsome temper to-day, Charley," I said, impatiently. "I will not ask you to my next picnic, you may depend upon that!"

Thereupon I entered warmly into the subject of our gipsy excursion to the Bolton ruins, ten miles distant, and near which, in a beautiful wood, we were to encamp and dine, or lunch, as they might feel disposed. Charles, too, became apparently quite interested on the various matters touching persons to be, or not to be, invited, carriages, provisions, wines, &c., advising, suggesting, and offering, in a spirit of cheerful promptness and clear-sighted skill that was exactly the species of impetus required to set me off smoothly and yearely.

“Sariann and you I can be sure of, then,” said I; “but the rector, will he honour us by his presence, do you think? I should be so glad if he would.”

“No; excepting his good wishes, and assistance in the carriage or victualling line. Near you must expect nothing more from me further.”

“Well, we must be content; and, oh, we will be delightful!” exclaimed I, oblivious of womanly dignity, and bumping ecstatically my chair. “Do you not long for the Harley?”

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“ Oh, don’t, dear Ennis!” whispered Sariann, in a tone of pain, that stopped me instantly.

Charles did not answer further than by spurring his horse so sharply and suddenly, it plunged with a frightened violence that, had he not been a skilful rider, would have thrown him to the ground. The three ladies could not restrain exclamations of terror.

We had now reached the brow of the hill, and commenced descending more quickly on the opposite side. The road wound gradually down, commanding an exquisite panoramic view of hill, dale, wood, and water; and, presently, appeared in sight the fine old residence of the Riversdales. It was, we all agreed, a nobly picturesque building, and the warlike style of its architecture fully entitled it to the substantial name of castle.

Lying afar off, in the wide-spreading, well-wooded valley, was our pretty village; and, yet further, a serpentine river pursued its glittering course within sight for miles from our present elevated point of observation.

As the carriages drove through the approaching lanes and principal street of Riversdale it was heart-cheering, as little Cherrup expressed

it, to see so general a presence of comfort, peace, and respectability as pervaded every habitation, and, in most cases, brightened the countenances of parents and children. The latter, clean and neat, as the children of the poor need be, were playing about in all directions; not with noisy, unmannerly quarrelsomeness, as is too generally the case, but with that subdued tone and feeling of enjoyment impressed upon them to maintain, alike in streets and houses, by parent and teacher, and which happy restraint, instead of lessening, doubly enhanced the pleasure of the entertainment, of whatever kind it was.

Fortunately for little Riversdale, it was quite the fashion among the neighbouring gentry to take a keen, often a loving, interest in the moral and physical condition of its poor; and so it was, therefore, few villages enjoyed such charitable care and Christian guiding as did this, producing, as that God-serving conduct ever must, the most beneficial results on both sides.

The weather being still and warm, cottage-doors were all open, and, in most cases, the poor men sat without, in porches or on rustic

seats, smoking their evening pipe and reading some one of the many magazines or newspapers with which they were generally supplied by the wealthy.

Riversdale possessed but one inn—the Bell, so called in honour of Mr. Bell, the host having lived as butler in his family for nearly thirty years. As may be supposed, the Bell was a most unexceptionably reputable, orderly house, late hours and excess of every kind being resolutely discouraged by the worthy landlord, who well remembered his old master's and the young ladies' great objection to such-like iniquities.

“’Pon my honour, I never saw such a jolly, well-to-do set of people as these are!” exclaimed Mr. Cherrup, leaning forward to gaze about him, and benignly smiling and nodding in especial personal acknowledgment of the humble greetings showered upon us right and left.

“Oh! I wish to my heart the Riversdales were not coming here. Of all their many fine places, why need they have selected this quiet part of the world to live in!” exclaimed Sariann. We were again slowly ascending a hill.

"Well, one thing is certain," interposed Charles, gravely; "if you wish to secure the happiness of the poor, the young, and the weak-charactered of every denomination, keep them in blessed ignorance of the world, and its odious fashions and follies; the more effectually you do that the more likely are they to find peace in this life, and—I should think—"

"Who do the 'they' really allude to, Mr. Charley?" I interrupted, feeling strongly suspicious Ennis Denzell was one of the weak-charactered individuals forming the list of those to be kept from temptation.

"In the present instance, to all the unsophisticated inhabitants of Riversdale, you amongst the number," replied Charles, smiling cynically.

"If you think me so ignorant of the world, and so weak in character, you are very much mistaken, Charley, I can tell you that!" replied I, flushing hotly at an insinuation which I considered so derogatory to my womanly dignity.

"Am I?" he answered, with provoking coolness.

"Yes, that you are! And I know very well

what, in your heart, you think and mean. You think me as deplorably ignorant of everything as the simplest cottage girl in our valley ; and, moreover, of so poor and fickle a character that the smallest temptation could overcome it !” A general laugh here interrupted this foolish remark, and I could not avoid joining, though very reluctantly. “ Under these circumstances,” I resumed, with instantly recovered gravity, “ you deem it advisable I should remain the ignoramus you consider me in order the better to secure this, in my opinion, very questionable style of happiness.”

“ Do not you think, Miss Enny, you give me credit for taking to myself a very much deeper interest in you and your concerns than is really the case ?” replied Charles, with quiet gravity.

I had not thought of this, and again my face burned.

“ But, as I said,” added I, hurriedly, and ignoring his remark, “ you are very much mistaken, Mr. Charley. There are many other ways, remember, of acquiring a knowledge of the world’s customs and fashions, quite as effectually as by personal experience ; and, though not a town-bred girl, I am certain my

hearing and reading has taught me as much as the majority of other girls know whom you are acquainted with."

This was rather a random assertion, the which I should have found it very difficult, or rather impossible, to prove, if required to do so.

"Indeed!" replied the aggravating Charles, making an amused grimace, as he bent forward and smoothed his horse's mane.

"Well, you will see," I went on, provokingly; "wait till the Ladies Riphon come, and you will find there is not the difference between us you imagine. Of course, I shall not be as elegant and accomplished, or anything else in these ways, as they are, for I have not been abroad, or had London and Paris masters; but you will find I am not more silly or simple than they are, for all that, Master Charley."

I looked at him in gay defiance, hoping, almost expecting, he would propitiate my wounded vanity by some polite rejoinder. But he did not; there came a pained expression into his face that contracted his brow and tightened his lips, and that was all.

"Do you rank me among your simple ones,

Mr. Beechley?" questioned Monica, glancing mischievously at him.

We were now proceeding rapidly, and Charles's answer, if he made any, was not heard.

Captain George bowed coldly and stiffly at parting; he had not yet forgiven my discourteous behaviour, nor did I wish him to do so, if a renewal of attention to myself was to be the result. Thus concluded our delightful picnic.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXTRACTS FROM SARIANN'S DIARY.

It perplexeth me greatly what could have occurred 'twixt Charles and Ennis the other day at the picnic. Did he, poor, hasty fellow, make her an offer of marriage, and was rejected? Albeit the manner of neither favours this supposition. Verily, had it been so, Charles would for a surety have gone from Riversdale that same evening or following morning, not to return, perchance, for months.

At home, the same evening, I did gently question of him whether he and Ennis had quarrelled.

"Quarrelled?" quoth he. "Oh, dear no! What puts such an idea into your wise little head, Sariann? Enny and I are as good friends as we ever were, whatever that may be," he added, gloomily, and as though to himself.

This abrupt reply shut the matter up more closely than before. I saw he did not like to be questioned; and, poor fellow, when in certain moods he is not to be trifled with. Thereupon I took the hint, and said no more.

How perfect in delight to me would have been that same picnic but for the two shadows which came down upon it!—to wit, the suddenly unsociable, irritable temper of my poor brother, and George Bell's undisguised preference for the society of beauteous Ennis. Ah, what wonder! What chance has any woman in her presence?

Dear, noble-hearted child, she discovered my secret. I saw that. How she effected the same I ken not. She did, however; and yet, despite her own fancy for him (aye, I feel sure she doth like him: what damsel could help liking good-natured, handsome George Bell?), she was, in her pretty, impulsive way, even too marked in her apparent indifference, her almost objection to the poor fellow's kind, manly attentions. And this was for me, unless she loves my brother, and, girl-like, will neither acknowledge, or by look or sign betray, unto living being she doth so. How-

beit, I think she does not; and poor Charles! I fear me his exceeding affection for her is his greatest enemy, seeing that it excites in his heart an over-anxiety for her welfare, which renders him dictatorial to her, and exacting, from which the sweet thing's bright, tenderly nurtured spirit shrinks with a commingling of winsome indignation, rebellion, and fear.

Would he were more pious, more God-serving! Ah me, that he had always been so! What life-long sorrow might it not have saved him and us! And now, were his rugged nature softened by intercourse of soul with our gentle, compassionate Saviour, how infinitely more forbearing, more sympathetic, would he not be towards his fellow-creatures! how vastly more lovable and pleasing, more especially unto her over whom his poor, longing heart hovereth night and day, day and night!

Until I know Charles better (better!—how strange does it sound for a sister but few years younger than himself to thus speak of an only and fondly loved brother!), and until some light has penetrated the hidden recesses of that

dark chasm in the past, never, although my weak heart desires it, never will I in any way favour a union 'twixt him and Ennis.

Yester - even Charles accompanied me to Riversdale Court to join Lady Denzell and Ennis at their pleasant early tea.

How delightful that ancient apartment the Oriel Drawing-room always is, with its divers adornments and comforts, in especial the presence of the comely Lady Denzell and beautiful Ennis. Methought this evening the cheery spot showed more than usually bright and attractive.

The tea equipage was on the table, and abundant dainties, in the manipulation whereof Mistress Patterson is wondrous skilful, presented a tempting appearance.

Lady Denzell, in her rich black silk, and snowy cap and cuffs, and her placid, kindly countenance full of hospitable thoughts, was, after her winsome, old-fashioned way, making ready the former; and Ennis sat her on a low seat in the oriel window. She was as usual dressed in white, her only ornament a gay little posy, which rested on the bosom of her

dress, and fastened thereto by a large pearl brooch. She was reading aloud to her grandmother as we entered, and ran forward with the open book in her hand to greet us, and, as was her wont, to warmly press her sweet soft lips to my cheek.

The golden beams of the setting sun slanted into the room through the western window, gilding this thing and that; its magic touches rendering yet more charming this lovesome home scene of domestic comfort and luxury. One bright ray glinted round and about Ennis, as she stood beside us; and with her every movement it played hide and seek, as it were, amid the shining braids and curls of her bonny brown hair, and strove curiously to examine into the beauteous lineaments of her face, down-bent after her shy, pretty fashion.

"We shall not be quite alone this evening," said she; "Monica Dormer is coming. Mamma and I met her to-day when we were driving out. She and her sister were riding, and mamma invited them to our early tea. Catherine was engaged, she said, but Monica promised to come."

In my heart I regretted this addition to our

pleasant party, but I said nought, saving a not much contented, "Oh!"

Truly, Monica Dormer is a sprightly and most comely little maiden, albeit I like not her company for Ennis. She is some years older—hath had two seasons in London and one in Paris, and is altogether of a quite different fashion to that simple, pure-minded child. It perplexeth me that Mistress Monica should be so opposite in character to all her family. Lord and Lady Dormer are right worthy and excellent people, much loved of Lady Denzell; and their fine, noble-hearted son is like unto them; aye, and even Mistress Catherine resembleth her parents more than she doth her sister. So it is also, Monica only is small; for a dignified height and bearing distinguisheth the Dormers.

Charles was silent, but, I perceived, neither did he desire the presence of the lively maiden Monica.

"Oh, there she is!" saith Ennis, as her blithesome voice, in converse with old Jeffry, was heard approaching.

"This is charming!" said the damsel, when presently, all interchanges of greeting over,

she flitted within the bow of the oriel window, and like a gay butterfly settled down on a cushion stool. This position placed her opposite to Charles, who, with hands behind him and stooping head, stood, after his manner, watching and listening.

"I really think this is the most delightful room in the whole county; do not you, Mr. Beechley?" she continued, her unrestful eyes glancing at my brother, and hither and thither, over every object and thing in the room, then back again to the masculine point of attraction.

"Yes, I think it is," said Charles, unhesitatingly, and sending a swift, covert look at Ennis, who had seated herself beside Monica, and was gazing admiringly at her coquettish little friend.

What marked contrast they presented to each other—these two fair creatures!

"Did you reach Mathon Hall in time for luncheon this afternoon, as you hoped to do?" questioned Ennis.

"Oh, yes, luckily. They expected Kitty, you know, so rather waited for her, though uncertain when she would arrive."

"Then Catherine is gone on a visit to the

Mannerings?" inquired Ennis. "Does she intend staying long?"

"About a week. What a nice girl Cassy Mannering is; do not you think so, Mr. Beechley?" quoth Mistress Monica, turning to Charles. "She is so very gentle and quiet, and has such a sweet expression. I consider her pretty, even though I know it is not the fashion to do so," added the maiden angler, casting her line; "just the sort of girl to take your fancy, Mr. Charles, is she not?"

"What makes you think I am an admirer of such extreme gentleness?" quoth Charles.

"Are you not?" she made answer, with a rippling laugh. "Well, I suppose my reason is, because you are so grave and quiet yourself."

"But, according to the principle of attraction, which in such cases is supposed to exist between opposites, your reason is not a good one, fair lady," rejoined Charles, a pleasant smile—alas! so rare of late years—lighting up his countenance, and rendering him for the nonce comely more than common. "Do you consider me so very grave and quiet, Enny?" said he; and into his voice and look there came a something—a mournful, tender ring—a depth; and into

the large, melancholy eyes an anxious, yearning expression, all mistaken of the little coquette, who, with blinding, well-satisfied conviction that speedily was his reputed cold heart becoming subjugated to her bewitchments, again laughed with yet more contentment, believing that much annoyed was he at her accusation of gravity and quietness.

"Not always, Charley," Ennis answered, in her musical voice, and a meaning smile playing round her mouth.

"They must be exceptional cases when he is not so, then," quoth Monica, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes; "when some one wishing to make a short cut jumps over his head, *par exemple*."

My poor brother reddened; but said he, pleasantly,—

"No man likes to be made a mark of, except to his advantage, Miss Monica; and especially a butt for ridicule. I think you will find, through life, that is a rule without any exception."

We were a chatty, jocund party at the tea-table. None can better keep the merry-go-

round swiftly turning, than comely Mistress Monica Dormer. Howbeit, but for brief spaces only could Lady Denzell, Ennis, or I obtain her attention, for she is one of that class of sprightly damsels who, in the presence of a gentleman—a young and clever man—deems all converse bestowed on her own sex as but a disagreeable necessity. Charles was, therefore, her loadstone of attraction ; and said he to me afterwards—for he noted the same,—

“Far more likely is Miss Monica, by such ways, to lose favour in the opinion of men of sense than to gain it.”

Quoth my Lady Denzell, “That was a beautiful horse you were riding to-day, my dear ; and by his delicate form and well-bred action is evidently intended for a lady : is he yours ?”

“Yes. Is he not a beauty ?” cried she, proudly, “papa has just given him to me ; had him broken in expressly—he is quite young. I call him Bismarck : he is my hero, you know. You can have no idea what fun we had christening him : it was a grand affair, I assure you,” continued the damsel, mixing man and horse together in most strange confusion ; then, turning her again to Charles. But alas for the faith

of her cavalier! he, instead of hearkening with bewitched ear to her lively talk, as had expected Mistress Monica, was, with rapt look, gazing at Ennis, as, with face unconscious of his scrutiny, she bent over her cup, listening greatly amused to the little flirt's gleeful chatter.

Not before had I deemed it possible so brightsome a countenance could on a sudden cloud o'er so darkly as did maiden Monica's at this discovery. Albeit, with marvellous self-control, the shadow passed swiftly, and said she—but so it was, a ring of jealousy sharpened her words,—

“Did you ever christen a horse, Mr. Beechley?”

Charles started, and quoth he, abstractedly,—

“Christen a horse? No, I can't say I ever have. Pray, how is the operation performed?”

“Operation!” repeated Mistress Monica, ironically, and glad, methinks, to thus have opened a vent whereby her annoyance could escape in disguise, “one would think you were a horrid surgeon, fresh from the dissecting-room! The idea of applying such a frightful word to a bit of fun like that!”

“What! the dissecting-room?”

"Oh, Mr. Beechley!"

"Do tell us all about it, Monica," petitioned Ennis, perceiving somewhat was amiss 'twixt the damsel and my brother.

"Yes—pray do," saith the latter, slowly, and with most unflattering indifference.

Thereupon Monica strove to give as humorous an account of the matter as lay within her now crippled power, for anon Charles lapsed into one of his half-abstracted moods, and thus chilled her ardour by his obvious efforts to seem pleased by the recital. Ennis was delighted, and I, forsooth, did my best to cover my brother's neglect; but all in vain—the little flirt persistently singled him from the others, almost exclusively directing her converse to his careless ear.

From the detection of that rapt look of his unto the conclusion of the evening, Mistress Monica's manner verily lost that easy, witching, blitheness so winsome at the first in her sayings and doings.

Methought, was it possible this lightsome creature loved—as did Dora Bell—my plain, stern barrister brother? or was it only mortified vanity so influenced her?

Of-times have I noted in others—ah, yes! and felt the like in myself also—that naught so mars the comeliness of looks, aye, and binds down as with cords all that is sweet and pleasant in a maiden, as jealousy.

By-and-by we had some most pleasant music. Ennis, in her soft, well-cultured voice, for Mistress Pitt was a perfectly skilled musician, sang that touching melody—the mournful words by Moore—‘She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps’—and truly a very picture of the beauteous songstress looked the dear maiden while breathing forth the sorrowful lament. I know of no pleasure more delightful to poor Charles than music; and none is so heart-winning to him as Enny’s fresh, girlish notes. He sat him beside Lady Denzell, watching and listening with absorbed attention.

Mistress Monica also scanned her friend curiously, and, I could see, in a frame of mind altogether new to her heretofore too self-appreciating character.

“What a dismal ditty!” quoth she, in merry disparagement, at its conclusion. “In the name of cheerfulness, Enny, what made you sing it?”

And so dolefully, too!—in that pathetic voice! why, if you were the dying minstrel herself you could not have done better!

“ ‘ She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers are round her sighing ;
But coldly she turns from their gaze—and weeps,
For her heart in his grave is lying,’ ”

mimicked the gay, thoughtless damsel, turning to Charles as she sang.

“ That is just like it, is it not, Monsieur Beechley ? ”

“ Not in the remotest degree, Mademoiselle Dormer,” he made answer, decisively, striving to steady his voice, full of deep feeling as it was, excited by the plaintive melody. Then rising and coming unto her as he perceived the offended flush spreading over her pretty features, he said, courteously, “ But now you must favour us with an Allegro, fair lady. It is by no means necessary girls should sing alike, to make their performances attractive ; remember, ‘ it is to variety women owe their charms,’ and one of those sprightly songs, of which I feel sure you possess an abundant store, will form a very agreeable contrast to the Penseroso Ennis has just bestowed upon us.”

Saith Ennis shyly, and blushing the while,—
“I do not know why, for I am rarely out of spirits, but melancholy music always seems more in harmony with my taste than lively music is: I mean,” quoth the sweet thing, correcting herself, “I like better to sing and play it myself. Perhaps the reason is quick movements are more difficult.”

By the look in my brother's countenance I perceived well how warmly he sympathized with this feeling; but he said naught, and thereupon little Mistress Monica immediately took to herself the flattering belief that his silence declared his disapproval of the same, and forthwith she commenced to cheer our depressed spirits by singing a right joyous ditty; yea, and not one only, but divers in rapid succession, thus showing off not merely her plentifully provided musical memory, but her excellent knowledge also.

She performed as cleverly as the first London masters could make her—the tones of her voice, albeit naturally thin and passionless, being clear, well tuned, and correctly timed. But herein lies the great difference 'twixt the two young voices: the first went straight to the

heart, penetrating into every its most secret recess; the second sped not beyond the head—no, not one stray note even.

At Lady Denzell's request I contributed two or three Scotch ballads of a bygone period. They were in a quaint, serio-comic style, and so vastly amused merry Mistress Monica and Ennis that the former laughed until the tears chased them down her flushed cheeks. Howbeit, I do not myself see anything so very entertaining in the tunes, and bethink me they must have been writ in the time of good, excellent Master Bunyan, the fashion of the verses being somewhat like his.

Finally, we all joined in the Evening Hymn; Lady Denzell's sweet low voice fervently accompanying in words of grateful praise to the great God whom from childhood she had so faithfully loved and served. Anon, Mistress Monica's coach came to fetch her home.

"Good night to you all," said she, bending forward her pretty sparkling face at the window, as we, to wit, Charles, Ennis, and myself, stood on the door-step to watch her departure. It was a glorious moon-lit night.

"And, Monsieur Beechley, I intend to cease-

lessly practise, 'She is far from the land,' &c., until even you confess my performance quite equals Ennis Denzell's."

"It will be time worse than wasted, Miss Monica."

"How can it be that?" laughed she.

"Experience will teach you," said Charles, almost gruffly.

The damsel again laughed mockingly, while in a doleful voice, which came floating back sadly enough on the still night air, she chanted distinctly, the while driving away,—

" 'She sang the wild songs of her dear native plains,

Every note which he loved awaking :

Ah ! little they think, who delight in her strains,

How the heart of the minstrel is breaking ! ' "

Some of the words were lost to our ear, but, acquainted with the verses, we knew what she was singing.

"Heartless little worldling !" growled Charles, as he turned and strode into the house.

CHAPTER XIX.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE VILLAGE FETE.

THE rustic *fête* given each year by grand-mamma was regarded as an event of unequalled importance in the simple minds of the villagers. To be excluded, therefore, from participation in its festivities, through any misdemeanour, was to the excommunicated almost equivalent to the punishment of bearing the mark of Cain on their foreheads during the probationary period that must elapse ere their reappearance the following year announced a happy restoration to the pardon and favour of the noble owner of Riversdale Court. So tenderly considerate and just was the "good lady" known to be that every well-disposed man, woman, and yes, even child, rallied to her side in unquestioning, unhesitating support of her grieved

displeasure against the delinquent. If even a member of their own family, he or she met with no milder treatment, for the offence must be of a direful character to oblige their benevolent benefactress to resort to so extreme a measure as the prohibiting their presence at an entertainment expressly provided for the gratification and moral benefit of her "poor friends," as she called them. Happily, however, such cloudings of the brightness of the festive day were of rare occurrence, and this preparation-morning seemed to me to open up more propitiously than had any of its predecessors.

Early on that day, I and a bevy of girl and boy acquaintances, who had gathered at the Court to assist me in my pleasant labour, sallied forth for the purpose. At first our spirits ran too high and wild to allow of much practical use resulting from our presence; but after a good deal of planning and suggesting, of attempts at arranging according to our own thoughtless ideas, and re-arranging according to the preceding ideas of others—doing considerably more harm than good in either case—scampering about the grounds, and in and out the house, laughing and talking, like a set of

mad things, and utterly discomfiting, not to say bewildering, the dignified Jeffry and dear old Tursey, we subsided into "a body of sensible operatives," as Harry Dormer said, and commenced work in earnest. This still proceeded, in a sort of whirlwind fashion, however, one and all being equally liberal in directions and advice; half the party generally adopting a totally different view of every matter to that taken by the other half, and striving amidst peals of noisy mirth to explain and enforce the opposition opinion. As may be supposed, much valuable time was thus lost, which had afterwards to be compensated for by greater and longer exertions.

And no light or trifling affair was this same labour of the day, despite the piece of mere fun and frolic our youthful spirits made of it. An orchard adjoining the pleasure-grounds, and which was during the first hours to be exclusively devoted to the women, the girls, and the babies, and later to both sexes, when the abundantly provided tea was laid out, was always decorated with flowers, arranged in every position and style. Festoons swept gaily and gracefully from tree to tree, and on

every available point were suspended, or wreathed, garlands and bouquets. This department of the preparations devolved almost entirely upon me and my little band of assistants, and a very arduous undertaking it was, but yet a sweet and pleasant one, thus lightened by such cheerful companionship.

As so exorbitant a floral requirement could not have been met without contributions from all the flower-gardens in Riversdale, and scarcely then, a heavy toll had to be levied on the neighbouring fields, meadows, woods, and hedgerows. Off we set, therefore, our party now further increased by the addition of Sariann and Charles Beechley, Captain Bell, and two country gentlemen—Mr. Burton, a man of large property, and a Mr. John Carsden—the four latter constituting themselves basket-carriers to the ladies. Three young collegians and two or three school-boys, at home for their holidays, completed our knightly attendants; one of the former being Harry Dormer, Monica's brother. The gentlemen—Burton and Carsden—were cousins, the first engaged to be married to Miss Dormer

a tall, handsome blonde—a singular contrast to her sister Monica in personal appearance.

Monica Dormer and I had for years been intimate friends, for, although three years my senior, her pretty figure, vivacious expression, and sprightly manners gave her the semblance of being even younger than myself. I was very partial to her society, but my inclination towards a warmer intercourse was always suppressed by the disapproval of Miss Pitt, and Sariann, with whom she was not a favourite. Both regarded her as of too light and frivolous a character to be a desirable companion for me. My governess, indeed, went further, declaring she was artificial and vain. I could not think her so myself, and believed my two friends had partly allowed their better judgment to be warped by over-anxiety on my account.

About noon we went to the house to rest and refresh ourselves. Good old Patterson had quite distinguished herself in the capital luncheon provided for the occasion, and which we attacked with a proud feeling of satisfaction that our right to it had been fairly won to-day,

if it ever had in our lives. Grandmamma, beaming with sympathy and hospitality, presided at the head of the table; and Jeffry, looking down on the surrounding flock of merry, flushed young faces with the benevolent approval of the privileged old retainer and friend he was, lingered for a while amiably dispensing the numerous dainties.

Johnny seemed endued with ubiquity. His active little figure was apparently present on every side of the table at once, despite his portly master's often angrily whispered "Don't be too boostling, Johnny; don't be too boostling."

But the picnic experience had, unfortunately for the success of Jeffry's lessons, impressed Johnny with the mutinous conviction that to win the approbation of at least the young portion of the company was more likely of attainment by the practice of a good-humoured alacrity than if, in imitation of his master, he cumbered his movements with stateliness and deliberation.

On one point, however, to Monica's and my great amusement, he took it into his head to imitate the latter. Quite overlooking the fact

that he was merely to follow—a humble satellite in the wake of the big luminary—he suddenly resolved to become an equally distinguished light. Catching up divers dainty dishes, he actually pressed their contents on those fair damsels whose appearance particularly attracted his rustic admiration. Monica's joyous laugh and sparkling black eyes were repeatedly thus favoured; and, to the speechless astonishment of Jeffry, who happened to be close at hand, he overheard his audacious page positively—could he believe his senses?—yes, positively heard him, in a confidential tone, strongly expressive of a patronizing friendly interest, urging Monica to partake of some dish he was offering for her acceptance, assuring the mischievously delighted girl “she didn't know how jolly nice it was—she didn't.”

Monica's eyes seemed trying to dance out of her head as she glanced at the rosy, earnest face bending over her.

“How do you know, Johnny? Have you been tasting it?” she rejoined, in the same low, familiar tones, but full of a pretendedly surprised reproof.

Fortunately for the success of Jeffry's

instructions, Johnny's shame and discomfiture on perceiving the fearful suspicion his polite attention had awakened so utterly subdued him that it at once extinguished all the poor good-natured little fellow's vivacity. His ruddy skin purpled to the roots of his curly hair with shame and mortification (how foolishly mistaken and keen are the feelings of the young!), and shrinking behind his master he became, to that great potentate's extreme satisfaction, the submissive, unobserved factotum he was intended to be.

Sariann, who sat beside grandmamma, told me afterwards it was a pleasant sight looking down the table at the long array of happy young faces right and left. Even Charles did not seem to-day out of place amongst us, for, as if resolved to efface all disagreeable impressions left on our minds by his capricious conduct at the picnic, he had, throughout our floral occupations, maintained that witty, enlivening conversation and manner peculiar to him when so disposed, and which never failed in delighting every one.

He was, I saw, often secretly chafed in spirit on witnessing Harry Dormer's attentions to

me and rather determined monopoly of my society during our flower-gathering expedition, but he sensibly abstained from any expression of bad temper, or from any attempt at competition with young Dormer's activity. He and the gallant captain contented themselves with the more dignified employment of carriers of the rifled spoils. Harry Dormer, handsome, generous, and warm-hearted, was two years my senior, and was an especial favourite of mine; not the less so, I am ashamed to say, because considerably more distinguished at Christ College for athletic than for literary honours,—so said report, at least.

Certainly, few living things but a March hare or a monkey could have competed with Master Harry in his agility and speed that day. At the slightest wish from me, away he went, regardless of sun and heat, over the fields and meadows to bring me cuckoo-flowers and bee-orchis, for which Riversdale is famous. Neither precipices of the most inaccessible aspect, nor trees of gigantic height, deterred him from risking life or limb to gather honeysuckle and other blossoms, bright-coloured leaves, mosses, &c.

Of all human creatures, who can match a brave, high-spirited boy—for he was really only that—in daring, reckless forgetfulness of self in moments of excitement? So sure was I he would unhesitatingly risk his very life even, if need were, to simply gratify my smallest, most unreasonable whim, that carefully did I avoid pointing out any more alluring baits growing in perilous positions, and I really felt relieved when the work was over, and further responsibility was thus taken out of my hands.

END OF VOL. I.

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